

# **Devil's** in a **Different** **Dress**



**Chris Barracclough**

## **Devil's in a Different Dress**

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## **Day 57**

Even after everything I've witnessed, those everlasting horrors and lifeless faces that haunt me every time my eyes squeeze shut, the scene in that kitchen was macabre enough to set me off. It was the blood, that's what did it. I've probably seen a couple hundred corpses in my lifetime, maybe more (I can only imagine the kind of man who would keep count), but those bodies had either been moved from the place they fell and cleaned up as best as possible, or else they'd died right there in the dirt. And when a man dies in the dirt, all his blood ends up in the soil. It just seeps away, in some kind of symbolic 'returning from whence we came' gesture that would make most poets piss themselves with glee.

But when this poor bastard was bludgeoned to death in his own home, his blood had splattered over a dozen surfaces and leaked across the stone floor and basically coated half the room. There was nowhere for all that liquid to trickle away to, so it was still shining brightly when we turned up around twenty minutes later. With all that fresh claret spread around the place, it was a good few seconds before I even focused on the body, sprawled face-down alongside the cooker. By then, the familiar cold and tingly sensation had swept right through my skin from scalp to scrotum and I knew I was in trouble.

“Oh, God,” Corporal Lane said in a hushed, almost respectful tone, squeezing past into the kitchen. His face slumped into his usual contemplative grimace, his brow furrowing and making him look a lot older than his twenty one years. “What a mess. Looks like someone caved the guy’s head in.”

“Yeah,” was my forced reply. I could already feel my heart hammering my ribs, perhaps hard enough to smash right through and burst from my chest. A second later, the world seemed to fade to grey and warp horrifically, as if the walls and ceiling were bending towards me. “Back in a sec,” I whispered, pushing from the room and staggering down the hallway. I quickly found the toilet, a tiny cubby joined to the back of the house and I dove inside, slamming the door behind me. I could feel the sweat pouring down my face, soaking into my uniform. My arse hit the toilet and I slapped my palms against the walls, holding myself steady and desperately trying to keep the room from closing in on me.

“Sweet baby Jesus,” I muttered, closing my eyes and sucking down great gulps of air until my lungs were aching. Usually it worked; on some occasions, I woke up a few minutes later with my face crushed into the floor. This time, thank the Lord, the dizziness and the nausea began to fade. When I was reasonably sure that I wasn’t about to keel over, I reached inside my jacket and found the tiny plastic bottle that lived inside the lining pocket, fumbling the lid and tipping one of the tablets onto my tongue. I swallowed it down whole, then waited. Counted how many breaths I took. Listened to the mumbled voices on the other side of the door, discussing the dead guy with the broken head.

When I finally emerged, I saw Lane stood by the kitchen door, chatting with some girl with tangled, mousy hair. She couldn’t have been any older than fourteen, a scrawny, short little thing with a nose like a Jew and mud-streaked clothes. The kid kept staring into the kitchen, goggle-eyed. Lane glanced at me as I walked up and gave me a funny look.

“Feeling alright?” he asked and I rolled my eyes.

“Stomach cramps,” I replied. I patted my belly for extra emphasis, then forced myself to drink in the bloody spectacle once more. The old man, Herr Schmidt, had probably been taken by surprise and struck from behind.

That much was apparent from the way he was sprawled across the ground. But even after he'd face-planted the floor, it looked like he'd maybe been bludgeoned another couple of times, given the amount of blood spattered about the place. Maybe he'd still been alive, struggling to push himself up off the floor. These old Germans were tough as hell, a whole other breed. They'd lived through too much godawful shit to be anything else. I saw that some of the blood had been smeared across the floor tiles, most likely where the murderer had stepped in the spreading puddle. A couple of partial prints led towards the door, but that told me nothing besides the obvious: the killer had been wearing shoes.

My amateur eyes roamed across the rest of the kitchen, struggling to pick out anything else that could be useful. Nothing appeared to be missing, at least not at first. There were plenty of possessions spread around that a thief could have made off with, from silver cutlery to the china plates. I gazed at the painting hanging on the walls, the same kind of artwork that seemed to be dotted around the entire house. Each picture was World War I era, mostly grandiose images of Wilhelm looking majestic on horseback with the sun shining down over his shoulder. I guessed that old Schmidt must have fought in that war. Funny, in a not-actually-funny kind of way. Imagine surviving two worldwide conflicts, two bloody battles on such an epic scale, only to be pummelled to death in your own kitchen. Quite a cruel little joke.

"This is Katherine," Lane said, and I turned to see him nod at the young girl. "She's a witness, saw someone leaving here." Lane smiled at the girl and jabbed a thumb towards me. "Go on, you can tell him what you told me." Katherine chewed her bottom lip, her gaze still fixed on the gore in the next room, then she peered up at me and shrugged her waif-like shoulders.

"I saw old Herr Jurgen hurrying out of here just a little while ago," she said, her words smothered in a thick German accent. "He was carrying a sheet on his back, like a sack. I don't know what he had inside. But I saw there were blood spots on the sheet, and on his shirt."

"Well," I said, "guess that's this one solved. Sounds like a robbery, nice and simple."

“Do you know where this Jurgen fella lives?” Lane asked the girl and she rattled off an address that was just three streets down. With our expert detective work done, we passed the mess over to the other boys and agreed to head straight to Herr Jurgen’s house, before he had a chance to destroy any evidence.

“Might want to usher her out too,” I muttered to Lane. The girl had tiptoed her way into the kitchen and was marvelling at the sudden and violent redecoration, her worn-out shoes edging dangerously close to the pool of blood. Lane nodded.

“Katherine, come on, come with us. We’ve got a few more questions need answering.” The girl pouted but followed us out anyway, kicking her heels as she shuffled along behind us.

The date was June 22nd, 1945. Europe had allegedly been at peace for 45 days and the Allies had total control of Berlin, while our personal occupation of the southern town of Rottstein had dragged on for almost two entire months. No one wanted us here, least of all us. I could see it in the looks the locals gave us, every time we passed them in the streets or strode into one of their stores. They weren’t just apprehensive, afraid, they were probably angry. Hurt. Some of the other lads didn’t understand, but I sympathised alright. To these people, we were just the Nazis in a different uniform. We had overrun their town, imposed our own laws, fucked with their way of life. The get-up we wear might be a different colour, but we still carry guns and we all look alike. Even worse, we speak a foreign bloody language.

“Should we swing by base first,” Lane asked as we stepped outside onto the cobbled street. “See if Shaw’s turned up?” I shook my head, pulling my second-from-last cigarette from the battered old pack and slipping it between my lips. It was only 5pm but already the sky was dark thanks to the sheet of jagged clouds, which had only just started to spit down at us. I grimaced, sparking up the cigarette with a match.

“Even if he is there, he’ll be bugger all use to anyone. Probably so hungover he can’t even strap on his boots, never mind lift his gun.”

Myself, Lane and Shaw had all served in the same regiment during the war, 165<sup>th</sup> Royal Armoured Corps. We were part of the operation that took

the town by force, removing the Fuhrer's grip on the southern border and helping to trap the bastard in his own goddamn hellhole. When our illustrious major slapped me with the dubious honour of head peacekeeper for the duration of the occupation, I chose Michael Shaw and Alex Lane as my partners. Faults and all considered, I had trusted them with my life out on the battlefield.

"How are we going to do this?" Lane asked as we strode down the street. He suddenly seemed anxious, reaching up and tugging on his ear lobe every few seconds. The guy was so mature for his age that I often forgot he was only twenty one. I'd seem him keep his cool even during outright carnage, when his superiors, myself included, were completely wiggling out. It was only during these quieter moments that I saw the mask slip, and understood that he was really just a kid beneath it all.

"Let's play it by ear," I said, wondering how real police back home would handle a situation like this. Smash their way in, guns drawn? Better not. We had a bad enough rep around here as it was. If we started kicking down suspects' doors, we'd be labelled tyrants for sure. "Try the polite approach, then as soon as we find the evidence, we take the bastard in." I turned to make sure the girl was still following. Sure enough she was just a stride behind, craning in to hear what we were talking about. "Katherine, right?" She looked up and nodded, her lips parting to reveal a gap in her front teeth. "Katherine, does Herr Jurgen live alone?"

"Yes," she replied. "He had a wife, but she was taken away by the Nazis."

"Okay. So why do you think Herr Jurgen would want to kill...uhh, what was that old fella's name again?"

"Herr Schmidt," Katherine replied, her mouth twisting into a frown. "I don't know. Herr Schmidt was nice. He never said anything bad about anyone. He used to let me take apples from his tree, when I was hungry. That's why I was in his garden when Herr Jurgen left."

"And Herr Jurgen, is he nice too?"

"No," Katherine said with a sharp shake of her head. "He's mean. He always looks at me bad, like he wants to kick me."

“Okay.” I took a deep drag of the cigarette, which was still just about lit despite the rain. Between the glorious lungfuls of smoke and my magic pill, I was feeling almost human again. “So were those two friends?”

“Sometimes.” Katherine said, and I raised an eyebrow.

“Sometimes?”

“Yes. Sometimes Herr Jurgen would go to Herr Schmidt’s house to help him...uhhh.” She crushed her eyes tight shut and pushed her fist into her brow, until finally her eyes flew open again. “Handy work,” she said with a flicker of a smile. “He helped Herr Schmidt in the garden. Herr Schmidt was too old. He gave Herr Jurgen money, to fix the garden.”

“Is that Jurgen’s job?” I asked. “Gardening?”

“Any kind of handy work,” Katherine said with a shrug. “House, garden, what you need. A lot of people in this town, they are old or....frail. They cannot work.”

“Right.” I turned to Lane. “What do you think, then?”

“Well...” He stared up at the blackened sky through narrowed eyes, the raindrops pattering across his face. “Maybe a botched robbery?”

“Yeah, could be,” I said with a nod, “but all that blood. This Jurgen guy must’ve beat the old bastard a good few times to open up his head like that. It wasn’t just a tap on the noggin, that guy really went to town.”

“You think it was some kind of personal vendetta?” Lane asked and I flicked away the dying cigarette.

“Aye, I’d say it was personal. Only one way to find out.”

When we got to Jurgen’s street, we told Katherine to wait at the end, out of sight. Of course, it was like telling a cow not to shit, for we’d only gone ten steps when she began to follow. We played statues for a little while, her freezing every time I glanced over my shoulder, until we reached number 8 (*sechs...sieben...acht*). Like Schmidt’s house, it was a detached cottage-style building with a compact garden between the front door and the street, but Jurgen’s little outdoor space was filled with all kinds of colourful plants and shrubs that I couldn’t even begin to name.



“Quite a feminine touch for a murderer,” I said off-hand to Lane. He smiled.

“He’s got greener fingers than my wife.”

“Okay.” I took a deep breath and scratched my chin, my other hand resting on the butt of my service pistol, which hung in its holster at my hip. “I guess we don’t want to panic him or anything, so maybe we go knock on the door and ask to come in. I’ll keep an eye on him while you search the place and try and find some bloody clothes or that sheet Katherine told us about. Make sure you check every cupboard and the back garden if he has one. Once we’ve got some evidence, we’ll take him in.”

Herr Jurgen’s curtain fluttered a few moments after we knocked and his face pressed up against the glass, all flabby and blotchy. Two pin-prick eyes peered out suspiciously through pink rolls of flesh. I made sure he got a good look at the uniform and soon after the door creaked aside. The man was nervous as hell, even I could tell that much. His gaze flickered between myself and Lane non-stop and he fumbled with his fat sausage fingers as I spoke to him, tugging each digit in turn.

“Herr Jurgen?” I began, with a straight expression. He nodded in response, the flab beneath his chin wobbling slightly, like flesh jelly. “You understand English?” Another nod. “Good. Can we come in, please?” A brief hesitation, then another shallow nod. I stepped past him into the narrow hallway and cut left into his front room, wondering if he actually had a tongue.

The place seemed rather cosy for a man of Herr Jurgen’s stature, with a low ceiling and quite a lot of gaudy furniture packed in. I positioned myself to the side, near the fireplace. Jurgen shuffled in behind me, followed closely by Lane. I smiled at the German, one hand still sat on the butt of my gun.

“What do you want,” he asked, confirming that he did indeed possess the ability to speak. His voice was even gruffer than I imagined, like an old man’s after a lifetime of cigars and whiskey.

“Were you at Herr Schmidt’s house about half an hour ago?” I asked him. Jurgen’s expression darkened.

“I visit him a lot,” he replied. “I help him tend to his plants.”

“That wasn’t what I asked. I asked if you were there half an hour ago.” As we talked, Lane slipped away to begin his search of the house. Jurgen noticed my colleague’s departure and turned to me, lips curled back in a snarl.

“Where is he going?” he asked. I sighed and tapped my fingers against the pistol’s grip.

“Never mind him. So, half an hour ago. You were at Herr Schmidt’s house.”

“Yes, I was.” The German folded his arms and glared at me. I shifted my stance and stepped a little closer, suddenly worried that he’d try and run. Not that he’d get far anyway. I figured that planting petunias was the limit of his physical exertion these days.

“Okay,” I said. “Did anything unusual happen while you were there?”

“Unusual,” he repeated.

“Right, unusual. Like, did you have an argument? A few angry words?” Jurgen paused before he answered, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, and when he finally replied his tone was deadly serious.

“No. Herr Schmidt was dead when I arrived.”

His answer took me completely by surprise. I should probably point out that I’d never interrogated a murder suspect before, only enemy soldiers. In that case, there’s no question of guilt or innocence. The aim of the interrogation is simply to extract information from the other man; attack plans, base locations, formations, that sort of thing. In this moment, I realised that I’d plunged deep into a foreign ocean, with no idea which direction land lay.

“Right,” I said. “You’re saying you showed up at his house and half the contents of his skull were already spread around his kitchen?”

“Yes.”

“Then why come straight home? Why not report his murder?”

“To who?” he asked. “To the British military? So you can blame it on me, lock me away without trial?” He slowly shook his head. “No.”

“Found it,” Lane called out, turning the corner a moment later and striding to the centre of the room. He was carrying a flowery table cloth, bunched up like a sack. I could hear soft clinking coming from within and my eyes were drawn to the red speckles dotted across the surface of the cloth. When Lane deposited the thing on the floor, it flopped open revealing dozens of tins and boxes. Gherkins, corned beef, cereal, sardines, peas, pretty much everything you could think of. It was a big enough stash to feed a family for weeks. I turned back to Jurgen, who hadn’t budged an inch. He was still staring at me with fear in his eyes, biceps folded across his enormous chest.

“What’s this?” I asked him.

“Food,” was the begrudging reply.

“Food you stole from Schmidt?”

“He didn’t need it,” Jurgen answered, turning his head to let out a throaty cough. I offered him the thinnest of smiles.

“Tell me you didn’t murder him just for a few tins of beef.”

“A few tins?” Jurgen jabbed a finger at the pile, eyes suddenly blazing. “That might mean nothing to you, but to me it’s better than a sack of gold. Ever since the British took over, our supply routes have been cut off. We’ve been living off meal and corn for weeks!”

“But Schmidt had this big old stash,” I interrupted, taking a step towards him. “And I guess he wouldn’t share with you?”

“Like I said,” Jurgen said, his arm dropping back to his side. “He was dead when I arrived. I saw the food, I took it.”

“How did you get inside if he was already dead?” Lane asked, brow furrowed. I kicked myself for not asking the same already, but Jurgen didn’t miss a beat.

“The door was open,” he said, aiming his withering glare towards Lane. “He may have been out in the garden and forgot to shut it.”

“Well, another question, then,” Lane said, his voice wavering slightly. “Where’s your hammer?” This seemed to throw the German off-balance, a ripple of emotion dancing across his face. Lane glanced at me and added, “I checked his tool box out in the kitchen. No hammer inside.”

“It broke,” Jurgen said with a hefty dose of vitriol, but I could see the despairing look in his eyes and I knew that we had the bastard.

“You’ll have to come with us,” I told him, my fingers curling around the pistol’s grip. His shoulders slumped a little, his hefty frame rocking back and forth like a flower caught in a breeze. I was worried that he might keel over right in front of us, so I stepped towards him with the intention of taking him by the arm and turning him around, before gently escorting him out.

Somehow, I don’t know how, I must’ve let my guard down. I didn’t see his elbow come up until that solid chunk of bone was driving hard into my nose. All I remember was a blinding flash of pain that shot through my entire skull, literally blinding me as my vision blacked out for a split second. I felt myself stumble backwards, then my calf caught on something hard and I collapsed against the fireplace, the rough stone scraping my back up through my uniform. By the time my brain stopped vibrating and my sight faded in again, I was sprawled at the base of the fireplace, in a half-sitting, half-squatting position.

The pain was horrendous, but swiftly forgotten when I saw what was happening in front of me. The German was fighting against Lane, the two men locked together and desperately trying to get the upper hand. Lane’s hand came up and grabbed Jurgen’s throat, but the move left him off-balance. Jurgen responded by twisting his body and forcing Lane away with his meaty shoulder. I saw my partner stagger away, but not before Jurgen reached down and snatched his service revolver right out of its holster.

I think I screamed something at him as he raised the gun, some useless sentiment like ‘don’t do it’ or ‘put it down’. I’ve heard some of the other guys talk about how life runs in slow motion at moments like this, but I’ve never had that experience. For me, it was over in a second. The German pointed the gun and just pulled the trigger and I saw Lane’s head jerk backwards and his body collapse to the ground, folding up as if someone

had flicked a switch. The next thing I knew, the gun was swinging around towards me. Somehow I managed to kick back to life, launching myself to the side and rolling behind a worn old armchair. The gun cracked again, the noise almost deafening in the confined space. I hit the wall behind the chair and lay there, staring up at the ceiling and gasping for breath.

“Shit,” I muttered, my own voice drowned out by the ringing in my ears and the thud of my heartbeat, hard and relentless. I wasn’t sure if the bullet had hit me but I couldn’t feel any pain, beyond the pounding throb that cut right to the centre of my skull. Part of me wanted to just lie there, waiting for the ain to subside. Close my eyes and drift off into some kind of hazy, desperate sleep. Instead I forced myself onto my knees and peered out over the armchair, searching for the German. The fat bastard was gone. All I saw was the pile of tins and packets and Lane lying slumped in the opposite corner, not budging an inch. The sight of his crumpled form shook me into action. I pushed myself upwards, my head screaming in opposition. Every tiny little motion was agony, as if I were shoving knitting needles into my own brain every time I dared to move, but somehow I staggered across to him and knelt at his side.

I was ready to shove my fingers into the flesh of his throat, to check his pulse. My hand didn’t even get close. One quick glance was enough to prove the poor bastard was done. The bullet had entered his left eyeball, blowing it apart and leaving little more than a gaping, fractured socket. My stomach convulsed at the sight of his remaining eye, staring up at me in shock. The fuzzy warmth of the magic pill snapped away and left me cold and vulnerable, fighting for breath. I raised a hand to my throat, sucking down desperate gasps of air. Air that smelled rich and bitter, like blood.

“Oh, Jesus.” I fell backwards and scrambled away on my hands and feet, fighting back the nausea. My fingers curled around the grip of my gun and I yanked it free, pausing to try and catch my breath before launching myself against the wall and clawing my way up it. A freezing cold chill shimmered down my back, spreading to my limbs. I stumbled into the hallway, flailing wildly with my gun in case the bastard was hiding in some corner, ready and waiting. Swivelling to my right, I saw the front door was hanging wide open. I lurched towards it, gritting my teeth at the pain.

A moment later I was outside, the ice rain pelting down hard now, soaking into my hair and streaming down my cheeks. Instantly I spotted him. The bastard was taking off down the street, already about fifty yards away. I grimaced and started after him. When I hit the road, I screamed for him to stop and jerked my gun up, aiming down the barrel at his back. Normally I'd have been reasonably confident about putting a bullet right in the base of his neck, but my sight was blurred from the rain and the goddamn shakes meant I couldn't even keep my arm straight. But then the German seemed to hesitate, staggering to a halt. I thought he was giving himself up so I slowed to a jog, swallowing down the bile that had leapt into my throat. Jurgen's bulky frame swung around and I kept my gun trained on him in case he tried taking any pot shots, but when I saw why he'd stopped, my finger eased off the trigger. One meaty arm was wrapped around the girl, Katherine, crushing her spindly body against his chest.

"Stay away," he yelled, spitting water. Katherine stared at me wide-eyed, struggling against his grip, but he was far too strong for her. I stopped thirty yards away from them, but I kept my pistol up. The girl wasn't a big enough shield to protect him. I squinted through the rain, meeting his despairing gaze. His head and shoulders were exposed, easy targets for anyone with a steady bloody aim, but by now my heart was pounding and my legs were like numb slabs of meat, not even connected to the rest of my body. Jurgen pointed Lane's gun back at me, his arm shaking almost as bad as mine. "Stay away," he repeated, the desperation all too clear in his voice.

"Let her go," I shouted back, knowing it was a useless gesture but trying to buy myself some time. I guess I hoped that somehow I'd snap out of it, just long enough to blow the bastard's head in half. He started to slowly back away, his shoes scrapping across the concrete. Katherine was kicking back at him now, her heels slamming into his shins, but if it hurt Jurgen he didn't let it show. "Where are you going to go," I called out, blinking hard to clear my vision. "You'll never get out of town. And even if you do, there's nothing around but empty fields and hills. Think about it, Jurgen!"

"I didn't kill the old man!" He jabbed the gun at me and Katherine winced in his grasp, the man's arm crushing her skinny little frame. I shook my head.

"It doesn't matter!"

“Yes, it does!”

I don't know if he meant to fire, or if his finger was just too tense on the trigger, but the crack of his pistol made me jerk in surprise. There was this whistling sound, high pitched, just an inch away from my left ear. The sound of death I knew all too well, which set my chest heaving twice as hard. I stumbled back a step, struggling to regain my balance as Katherine squealed and wrenched her body. Jurgen tipped to his side, fighting to keep her still and suddenly she wasn't in front of him any longer, giving me a clear line of sight straight to his torso. I didn't even pause to think. I just sucked in a breath and held it, my hand trembling worse than ever as I aimed through the rain and squeezed off a shot. The gun kicked against my palm and I saw Jurgen stagger, a second before his legs buckled and the pair of them crashed to the ground.

“Shit,” I grunted, powering towards them. Katherine was yelling something in German, pushing frantically at Jurgen's meaty shoulder which had her pinned against the road. I almost slipped before I got there, the sole of my boot sliding sideways across the wet stone. My gun flew from my fingers and clattered across the ground and I stooped to snatch it back up, cursing and muttering as I slipped it into the holster.

By the time I got to Katherine, the rain had soaked right through my shirt and was stroking its way down my spine. Its icy touch was pushed far to the back of my mind. A quick glance at Jurgen showed he was down and out, still alive but fighting for breath. The bullet had caught him just to the left of his heart, probably shattering his breast bone. A red patch was already spreading across his chest. I kicked away Lane's pistol, then I dropped to my knees and grabbed the German's arm, heaving him upwards to give Katherine room to wriggle free. She pulled herself away and glared up at me.

“You shot me,” she yelled and I stared back dumbfounded. The girl pointed her shoulder at me and jabbed a finger at a spot just above her bicep, where the raggedy dress was torn. I tenderly reached down and pulled back the fabric and saw an angry red trail carved across her flesh.

“Oh, Jesus, I'm sorry, pet. Are you alright, does it hurt?”

“Of course it hurts,” she said, but the anger melted from her face when she glanced across at Jurgen. He had one hand pressed to his wound, but I’d seen injuries like this a dozen times. The way he was gasping for air meant one of his lungs was probably punctured. Any second now, he’d start coughing up the blood that was seeping inside. Just a matter of time before he drowned. Even Katherine seemed to realise, for she crouched beside his head and peered down at him, a sudden sadness in her eyes. Jurgen stared back, the tension melting from his jowls until finally he looked at peace. Time for one last breath before he fell still and silent.

I didn’t know what to say or do, so I just sat there with the girl, allowing the water to chill every last inch of me. I pretended not to notice the faces at the windows, staring out at us. How long would it take for this story to get around town? Gunning down locals in the middle of the street; Christ, even the Nazis were probably more subtle than that.

“You seen a dead body before?” I asked Katherine. She looked at me with a curious expression.

“Of course. Everyone has.”

“Aye, right.” I fumbled in my pocket for my last cigarette and slipped it between my lips, but in seconds it was already too soggy to light. I let it dangle there, limp and useless.

“What’s your name?” the girl asked. I ran a hand through my hair, splashing water down my already-saturated uniform.

“Captain King,” I muttered. She just kept staring, so I shrugged. “Adam. My name’s Adam.”

“Ah-dum,” she said, trying it out. For some reason that made me smile.

“I’ll take you to the doc,” I told her, “get that arm looked at. Where do you live?” Suddenly her eyes grew wide and she turned to her side, hiding the injured arm.

“I’m okay. It doesn’t really hurt.”

“It’ll get infected. Don’t worry, he’s a nice guy, he’ll give you something for the pain and get it all cleaned up.”



“No, I’m okay,” she said, jumping to her feet and running off down the street before I had a chance to grab her. I called after her but she didn’t even look back. She was out of sight before the first truck pulled into the street and roared towards me.

## **Devil’s in a Different Dress**

**Chris Barraclough**

### **One (Adam)**

Just when you think the killing’s all done. Just when you think you’ve seen your last buddy seize up, his eyes turning a milky white as the life trickles out of his body, God comes right back and shows you that nothing ever ends the way you think it should.

I’d been stood in the cold, dark little room with its damp walls and musty smell for around half an hour when the metal door creaked open behind me and footsteps padded in. From the guilty little clearing of his throat, I knew straight away that it was Corporal Shaw. He lingered there in the doorway for a little while, before finally shuffling to my side. Together we stared down at Corporal Lane, still dressed in his blood-spattered uniform. I was thankful that the doc had closed his one remaining eye, hiding away the shock and the horror that was captured the moment before he died.

Eventually Shaw exhaled and shook his head.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there,” he said. I tilted my head and peered sideways at him. His cheeks were pale and his eyes were raw, the bright red veins popping and cracking all the way to his crystal blue irises. Even before he turned towards me, the stench of whiskey was all too obvious. I knew that I should have been mad. Scratch that, I should have been furious. But it was

pointless. Even if I'd taken him along, even if all three of us had been in that room, the outcome would almost certainly have been the same. Perhaps worse. It had all happened so fast, Lane hadn't stood a rat's bollock of a chance.

"Where did you wake up this time?" I asked.

"Lake." Shaw sniffed and dragged a sleeve across his face. "I was cold out until one of them gulls came pecking at my arm. Could only find one boot, so I had to hobble back to base. Good job it's not far." I watched as he reached out and rested his right hand on Lane's shoulder. Two of his fingers had been sheared off at the knuckles by a grenade just a few months before the end of the war, so now all he had were rounded nubs between his thumb and his ring finger. Even though I was used to the sight, I still couldn't help but stare. By rights that mutilation should've been his ticket out of here, but that fun-loving God on high had other ideas. Our squad was already entrenched into enemy territory by then. Not only were we desperate for all the men we could get, but getting Shaw out would've been a tough operation. The clincher was the hand that got blown apart. The unfortunate twat was left-handed, so he could still fire his revolver and basically function as normal, or at least that was the diagnosis of our illustrious Major. So here he stayed, balls deep in the fatherland with a broken hand and a fresh layer of mental trauma. "They said you got the bastard," Shaw muttered and I nodded.

"Fucking handyman gardener. Killed an old man because he wouldn't share his biscuits and tinned ham. We went to arrest him and he got the better of us. Bowled me over, right before he grabbed Lane's gun off him. Couldn't have messed it up any more if we tried."

"It's a bloody ridiculous assignment," Shaw said. "We're not detectives, policemen, peacekeepers, whatever they want to call us. Might as well order us to be plumbers or carpenters or bloody engineers." As usual, I felt a stab of guilt. Shaw still didn't know that I asked for him personally, when the order came down. As far as he knew, he was just chosen from on high, same as me.

"I'm seeing the Major when he gets back," I said. "After this balls up, chances are we'll be reassigned anyway."

We stood in awkward silence for a while, staring at our dead comrade until Shaw turned and walked to the wall, leaning up against it. He crossed his arms and sighed.

“Poor bastard survived years of conflict,” he said, his painful gaze locked on Lane. “Full frontal assaults, endless bloody bombing raids, some proper suicide missions. Comes out the other end unscathed, not a scratch on him. I thought the lad was truly blessed. Then some German gardener puts a hole in his head two months after war’s end, with his own bloody gun no less.”

“It’s a joke,” I muttered. “And a bloody terrible one.”

When I stepped into the Major’s office later that afternoon, I was braced for the absolute worst. Major Alastair Stevenson had taken over and led us through the most harrowing depths of hell for thirteen long months and if it wasn’t for his resolve, his determination and sheer tenacity, we’d never have made it to Rottstein and cut off the Nazi’s final supply route. But that spark which had kept us all alive seemed to fizzle out when we took occupation and the boys rang out the bells to signify the end of it all. The mission was over. Nothing left to do but sit and wait, until the order came to move on out. Right now he was half-slumped over his desk with a British newspaper splayed open in front of him and a glass of cognac in one hand. A cigar burned near his other hand, propped up in a glass ashtray. I paused and knocked on the open door and waited for him to finish whatever sentence he was reading before he raised his head and stared at me, expressionless.

“Come on in, Captain,” he said, leaning back in his chair. I nodded and strode up to his desk, taking the chair opposite only when he gestured towards it. The office had previously belonged to the Burgermeister of Rottstein and the man obviously had a unique sense of humour, plus an even worse sense of taste. Housed above the window were three animal heads, shot and stuffed and mounted on wooden plaques. A fox, a deer and some kind of wild pig with tusks like daggers. They were positioned in such a way that they stared down accusingly at any visitors, like a silent panel judging your every thought. As an empowerment technique, it worked a little too well. I’d suggested to the Major that he might want to take them down, but I think he enjoyed seeing his visitors squirm just as much as the Burgermeister had.

“So,” the Major said, knocking back the cognac. “Tell me, in explicit detail, exactly what happened.”

I told him the full torrid tale, leaving out only my brief foray to Schmidt’s toilet to take my medicine and the dizziness that struck as I chased the handy man into the street. I’d tossed back another of those magic pills before stepping into the office and already my brain felt like it was wrapped in a warm, fuzzy blanket. The Major listened in silence, his brow creasing when I reached the part about Jurgen overpowering the both of us. The whole bloody scene was playing out again inside my head, every tiny detail recalled as if I were right back in that room. But this time the pain was numbed and anxiety didn’t strike. I watched calmly as the German snatched Lane’s pistol and fired it at point blank range and my comrade fell out of the frame. My heart didn’t speed up, hammering my ribs when the gun turned towards me. And when the bastard fled, I simply floated after him. He was stood in the middle of the road, the girl clutched to his chest, and I pulled my own weapon and fired a single shot, putting him down for good.

“What happened to the girl?” the Major cut in. I shook my head and spread my palms.

“I don’t know. I asked her where she lived and she just ran off.” He pursed his lips and reached down into his bottom desk drawer, pulling out the bottle of cognac and setting it on top of the newspaper. He topped up his glass and lifted it to his nose, giving the dark liquid a cursory sniff before tipping back a mouthful.

“You know,” he said, easing back into his chair, “this is precisely what I was trying to avoid when I gave you this assignment.” His tone was strangely calm and I felt the first twinge of unease settle in my stomach.

“I know, sir,” I replied, clearing my throat. “He took us by surprise. I should have been ready when he lashed out at me.”

“Doesn’t matter.” The Major sank some more of the booze and tapped the glass against the edge of the desk. “What matters is how we handle this. If things get any worse between us and the fucking Germans, we’ll have a riot to deal with.”

“Yes, sir.”

“They’re already right on the edge from God knows how many years of Nazi rule. If they see us shooting their friends and family in the middle of the bloody street, they’ll dive right over.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I mean, Christ almighty. Killing someone for a few biscuits and some bread.” He finished the glass and pushed it away, reaching for the cigar instead. “Are you sure that was the full story?” the Major asked, before sucking down a lungful of smoke. I thought back to what Jurgen said to me, how he refused to admit his crime even when my gun was aimed at him. Not just that, he’d vehemently denied it. Denied it with all his might, perhaps a minute or two after I watched him gun down a soldier.

“Yes, sir,” I said, my guts turning to lead inside of me. He stared at me for a while, the cigar smoke trickling from both nostrils. Then he shrugged and flicked away the overhang of ash.

“Fine. Go back to base. I’ll assign a new recruit to work under you, you’ll have him in a day or so.”

“Sir, I-”

“I’m choosing this time, Captain.” The way he stared at me reminded me of the old him, the man who led us into a wall of gunfire and mortar shells to take over this town. But that spark of passion sank back down again as soon as it emerged. The Major pushed back into his chair and flicked a hand towards the door and I rose with a nod. One last glance at the panel of angry heads, then I departed with a burning deep down inside my gut.

I was halfway back to the barracks when I realised I’d left my hat at the morgue. By now the second magic pill was most definitely wearing off, so I cursed and kicked out at an innocent rock lying helpless in the road, before turning and stomping back the way I’d come. Thoughts of desertion danced around in my head, the glory of being free of this godforsaken town and its inhabitants and this meaningless duty. Heading home to the family, or what was left of it at least. Meanwhile, my feet automatically carried me back to the stone shack we were using to store the dead before burying them or shipping them off.

The place was quite small, just four rooms in all, connected by a tiny corridor. When we'd first taken over the town, each room had been quickly filled with corpses, arranged across every spare bit of floor space. Now there were just three inhabitants, each lucky enough to possess their own private quarters. The first room on the left was Lane, while opposite was Herr Schmidt. Herr Jurgen was stored in the far right room and for now the far left was empty. I had the feeling, given the tension and the madness that seemed to have gripped the entire bloody town, that the damn thing wouldn't be empty for long.

I quickly grabbed my hat from the hook in Lane's room and was stepping back out when the door opposite swung open and a young lady dressed in a bright red coat and a long, slightly shabby brown scarf hurried out into the tiny corridor, almost stumbling straight into me. She glanced up and saw me just in time, peering at me through suddenly terrified eyes, half-hidden beneath long, golden curls of hair. At a guess, I'd have said she was a few years younger than myself, perhaps eighteen or nineteen. She licked her lips and bowed her head slightly, staring down at my chest.

"S-sorry," she said, her voice breaking apart. She cleared her throat and dragged her fingers through her hair, pulling it from her face.

"That's alright," I replied, fumbling my cap in my fingers. I stared over her shoulder into the room beyond and saw Herr Schmidt laid out on his back. The doc had done a decent job cleaning him up, but his clothes were still soaked in blood and there was no disguising the crater in his head. "Did you know Herr Schmidt?" I asked the girl.

"Opa," she said, risking a quick glance up at me. I nodded and sucked on the inside of my cheek, wondering if I should pop another of the pills. No more than one a day he'd said, and I'd already sunk a pair.

"I'm sorry for your loss. I heard good things from some of the other townsfolk. They said he was a generous man." The girl's expression didn't change, but her head raised a little, tilting to the side.

"Generous, yes." She shook her head and pulled another stray tangle of hair away from her eye. "Sorry, my English, it is not very good."

“Don’t worry,” I said, forcing a goofy grin. “My German, bloody awful. I can say, uh, ‘ich bin Englisch’ and ‘nach hause gehen’.”

“Good,” the girl said, and a glimmer of a smile crossed her lips. “Good accent.”

“No, terrible accent, but thanks anyway.” I coughed into my fist and realised I hadn’t felt this bloody awkward in a long, long time. “What’s your name?”

“Lorielt,” she said, dipping her head again.

“Lorielt,” I repeated. “Good to meet you.” Then, not really knowing what to do, I donned my cap and held the front door open for her. She stepped briskly out into the fading daylight with a grateful smile and a nod and I followed, wishing her a good day before striding off towards base.

## **Two (Katherine)**

When I came back to the house, the place was deathly quiet. I called out for Katz but heard only silence in return. Typical. Just when I needed him most, the big lug was out scavenging somewhere.

My arm was still throbbing as if Pieter had pounded it good with one of his knuckle punches, so I headed to the back garden and eased it out from my sleeve. When I saw the naked wound, I winced. I’d had plenty of cuts and bumps and bruises before, but this was worse. A gash as thick as my finger, and so deep that I was shocked that I couldn’t see bone. It was black from where the blood was getting all crusty. I stared at it for ages, then I stooped by the little tap that was underneath the window and I ran a trickle of water. Chewing on my lip, I slowly slipped my arm beneath the ice cold drizzle. The dried blood dissolved away from my skin, but when the water touched the gash, it felt like someone had pressed a burning match to my arm. I jerked away with a yelp and tumbled over backwards. My arse slammed onto the stone paving and I cried out again, rolling over onto my

side. I crushed my eyes tight shut, waiting for the pain in my arm to ease off until it was just a throbbing ache again. Even then, I didn't feel like getting up. The ground felt good beneath me, cool against my cheek and my palm. I stretched out my limbs and sighed.

*Katherine, what on earth are you doing girl! Come on, on your feet, right now! You're not a dog, you don't roll in the filth like one!*

"Yes, mother," I said, pushing myself up with my good arm and shuffling back inside.

I'd grown up in this house before the Nazis came and ruined everything, but even though it was different now, it suited me and Katz fine. We were out on the edge of town, away from the crowds and close to the woods where we took our walks. Best of all was the enormous basement where I'd played Ghost Hunter as a child and that was where I trudged, nursing my injured arm. The old wooden stairs creaked beneath my feet as I descended into the dark. I'd placed one of my scavenged candles at the very bottom, along with some matches, because the bulb dangling down from the ceiling didn't work anymore. Carefully I struck a match and lit the wick, before creeping across to the far corner. Down here it was damp and cool (hence the perfect place to find ghosts), which felt amazing on hot, dry days. Somehow the cold air seemed to help my aching shoulder, easing the horrible burning feeling. I let out a tiny sigh of relief.

I kept a big, soft blanket in the corner, next to my treasure chest which was filled with all the fascinating things I'd found just lying around, mostly after the English soldiers came and stole our town from the Nazis. My prize find was a silk handkerchief, which had a picture of a tree sewn into one corner. It felt so good against my skin so I always took that out first and stroked it against my cheek. Carefully I set the handkerchief aside and rummaged through the rest of my collection. A slightly squashed hat, a silver cigarette case, two chipped wooden ducks that were painted yellow and red. And there at the bottom, the German pistol that I'd found beside a dead body and took when no one was looking. I don't know why I'd picked it up. After everything that had happened, I thought that I'd hate guns forever. Still, somehow I felt safer knowing that it was here if I ever needed it.



Katz came back that evening just as the sun was starting to drop. I was up in my bedroom by then, staring out of the window at the woods and the corn fields beside them. As usual I heard him before I saw him, his claws tapping against the wooden floorboards as he raced up the stairs and into my room. He was panting hard, his huge fleshy tongue dangling from his jaws like a dead animal. I figured he'd been chasing squirrels again, getting all overexcited. He jumped up at me, almost bowling me over. When he stood up on his back paws like that he was easily as tall as me, his nose pushing up against mine, all wet and slimy. I laughed and pushed him back down, which made my arm ache all over. He wasn't to know, though. He's just a dumb dog.

Katz spent some time chewing his own leg while I slipped out of my dress and frowned at the raggedy blood-stained tear in the shoulder. This was one of my favourites, the daisies reminding me of the daisy chain necklaces my mother used to make for me. I carefully folded it up and left it to one side while I pulled on another one, the green dress with the ribbon on the sleeves.

"Come on, Katz," I said, scratching him behind his ear until he stopped biting his fur. "Let's go for a walk."

We'd only just cut inside the woods when Katz sniffed out a squirrel or some other hapless animal and immediately hurtled after it, howling and snarling and snapping his jaws. I took off after him, ducking the thorny branches and leaping over muddy craters, but he was too fast for me. Soon his shaggy hide was hidden from view and I only had his angry barking to follow. I called after him, knowing that it was hopeless. When he gets a whiff of those little furry creatures, he turns all crazy. This one must've been a rabbit, because a squirrel would've been straight up a tree and I'd have no problem catching up. But this one just kept on running and eventually I couldn't even hear Katz barking any more.

"Dumb dog," I hissed, slowing a little to let my legs recover. I was already a little out of breath, so I sucked down some big lungfuls of the mossy air and rubbed my side where it had started to ache. "Should put you on a lead, see how you like that." Except it wouldn't make a difference, I'd just be dragged along behind him.

Suddenly I thought I heard a sound from somewhere off to my left. I stopped dead and turned, freezing in place. I couldn't be sure, but I thought it sounded like a man shouting. For a moment I considered calling back, but something stopped me before my lips parted. No one from the town ever came out to these woods. If there was someone out here, it was probably one of the English soldiers; their camp was just to the West, a little past the lake, in the old Nazi barracks. So instead of calling, I just kept on going straight, this time keeping as quiet as possible.

I didn't hear any more voices and soon I was at the edge of the woods, peering out towards the lake. The sun was dipping low now and in another hour it would be gone entirely. I chewed my lip and watched the silhouettes of the soldiers, gathered at the lakeside as normal. They were already screaming and hollering at each other, but I could hear a violin straining to be heard over the din, playing some up-beat music that I'd never heard before. I listened for a little while, before my heart leapt at the sound of a dog barking frantically. The next thing I saw was Katz bursting from the trees and tearing across to the soldiers.

"Katz," I hissed, watching in horror as the dumb dog bounded up to the gathering and started leaping in circles, howling and panting. The soldiers matched his enthusiasm, jumping out of his path and laughing like children. Before I really had time to think about it, I found myself hurrying across the muddy field towards the lakeside, my shoes slipping across the slimy surface. Twice I almost toppled face-first into the filth, but I kept my balance and charged up to the group. Katz was leaping up at one of the soldiers when I got to him, throwing his paws onto the man's chest and barking non-stop, but when I called out to him he backed down and shuffled over to me, his head bowed like he knew he'd done wrong. "Bad dog," I scolded him, suddenly aware that every soldier was staring at me. Some of them looked surprised, but most of them just looked amused.

"Is that your dog?" one of them asked, a short, skinny man with a thin moustache. I nodded back, resting an arm across Katz's neck.

"He's a beast," someone else said, daring to step closer. This one had a cap slung backwards across his head and was clutching a bottle. The soldier held out a hand as if to pat Katz, but he pulled back sharpish when Katz

unleashed another mighty bark. “Jesus,” he spluttered, laughing and swigging from the bottle. “Take your bloody arm off, that thing.”

“Or your bollocks,” cackled another. By now my cheeks were burning and I wanted nothing more than to swivel around and run right back to the woods, but I also didn’t want to hear these men crowing behind me, laughing at the scared little girl. So I just gripped Katz’s fur and pulled his head against my thigh.

“He would do that only if you annoy him,” I said, forcing my chin up. The skinny moustache man held up one hand and moved the other to his groin.

“Well, I’m a very amicable person,” he said, backing off a step. “And I like my bollocks too much to test him.”

“Don’t know why, Moss,” bottle man laughed, “you never have any use for the bloody things.”

“Not stuck out here with you lovely gents, no. But when I get home, they’ll be bursting for action again.”

“Hey.” The bottle was jabbed in Katz’s direction. “Does your doggy like whiskey?”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “He gets sick.”

“Can’t hold his booze. Damn shame!” He held the bottle out to me instead, the smirk growing across his face. “How about you, girlie? You like whiskey?”

I stared at the brown glass bottle and the liquid sloshing around inside and was suddenly aware that my heart was thudding hard inside my chest. I’d tasted alcohol a few times, with the others. Mostly wine. I figured whiskey would be the same and for some reason I decided that I wanted to prove myself to these men. So I reached out with my good arm and took the bottle. The glass was warm and clammy against my palm and as I lifted the neck to my lips, I was aware of two things. First, the sudden quiet all around me and second, the strong, pungent smell that forced its way up my nostrils. The violin music rang in my ears and I held my breath and tipped the bottle up, allowing the whiskey to trickle out over my tongue. The taste

was horrible, not at all what I expected, but the worst came when I swallowed it down in a hurry. It felt as if I'd stuck my head in a fireplace and inhaled the thick black smoke. My throat closed up and I started to choke and cough, doubling up and almost dropping the bottle. Beside me, Katz began to bark and howl again, jumping up onto his back paws like a startled horse.

"You okay?" Moss asked, gently taking the bottle away and resting a hand on my back. My mouth was suddenly filled with saliva, so I was too busy spitting it out across the pebbles to answer him. Eventually I managed to catch my breath and the burning sensation faded, but my throat still felt all gravelly and raw.

"Good girl," bottle man said, taking back his whiskey. "Think that means you can join our squad, eh Mossy?"

"You really are a prize-winning prick, Kali," said Moss, but when I glanced up at him he was smiling. "You know," he whispered to me, "most people would've just had a sip. Not knock it back like it was water."

"I'm sorry," I gasped, one hand clutched to my chest. He shook his head.

"Don't be. I just hope you haven't contracted any unpleasant diseases from that idiot. What's your name, young 'un?"

"Katherine."

"Well, Katherine, I'm Second Lieutenant Moss, and this drunken wretch is Private Kali, and...well, this is our merry band of drunks and reprobates."

"Hello," I wheezed, hoping with all of my might that I wouldn't vomit everywhere.

### **Three (Adam)**

Just like every other night, we ended up slumped beside the lake, playing poker and drinking whatever cheap booze the boys had brought us. That

was yet another wretched thing about this place. Food was in horrendously short supply, with days of eating nothing but bread and corn between the odd morsel of stringy meat. But every man's booze ration was generous enough to drown a cow. We had so much of the stuff that we couldn't drink it fast enough, even though at least half of the squad were hardcore alcoholics by now.

Pearson had started up with the violin as usual, playing the only five songs he knew in a continuous loop and quickening the rate at which I downed my whiskey. The sun had just set, so the lake was now little more than a gaping black void in front of us. Along the edge, five enormous bonfires had been erected and the flames licked up at the night sky, the wood hissing and popping beneath. I twisted away from Shaw who was collapsed on the shingle beside me, a bottle of wine clutched in each hand, the right one pinched between his thumb and two remaining fingers. With a jagged rock sat in the pit of my stomach, I squinted through the gloom at my cards. I had pocket jacks, not exactly a stellar hand but I was feeling reckless. Besides, by now Shaw could barely even focus on his cards let alone bluff or read my tells.

"Two more fags," I announced, throwing in a pair of cigarettes. The pile on the rock between us was reaching serious numbers now, almost a pack and a half. Without hesitation, Shaw fumbled in his pocket and tossed a handful more onto the heap.

"See 'em, and raise...however many that is." He belched and knocked back more of his wine, then he tossed the bottle and belched again. I grit my teeth. Was this cockiness spurred by a great hand, or was it just the booze talking? I only had four fags left and he'd just chucked six extra onto the makeshift table.

"Fine," I said, dumping the last of my supply onto the pile. "I'll see you. What do you have?"

"Well." He grinned and laid down his hand and I had to twist my neck and narrow my eyes to see the cards. Three kings stared back at me, looking rather smug.

"Bloody hell," I spat, tossing my own cards away. "Whoever invented this stupid game is a prick of the highest order." Shaw just reached out and

roughly snatched up the cigarettes, stuffing them into his pockets.

“I feel like a smoke,” he said, slipping the last one into his mouth and patting his jacket until he found his old lighter, the dark silver one with the dent in the side. I watched his face glow like some kind of malevolent spirit’s as he sparked up the cigarette.

“You really are a lucky bastard,” I told him and he nodded, puffing smoke from his nostrils.

“Damn sight luckier than poor ol’ Laney.” We shared a grim look and I lifted my whiskey to my lips, knocking back a generous swig. “I really do wish I’d been there,” he said after a brief silence passed between us. “He didn’t deserve that.”

“No one ever does,” I muttered. Something stirred deep in my gut and I wondered why I didn’t feel something stronger. Anger, remorse, guilt, the usual attractive emotions we seem to burden ourselves with. Had three years of trekking through hell made me numb to the death of a friend? Somehow, after everything I’d seen and everything I’d done, it was the nameless and countless dozens that I’d put down myself that stayed with me. I dragged my palm down my face and glanced across at Shaw. “You heard anything from Mary yet?” Just an innocent change of subject but at the mention of her name, his lips pulled thin. Guess not, then.

“Bugger all. Not a damn word since we got here.”

“Maybe a problem with the post?” I ventured, knowing it was a stretch. I’d had four letters already from mum since the occupation, even though she could barely hold a pen these days thanks to her arthritis. Shaw snorted.

“I’ve sent half a dozen messages back, just in case some of them didn’t get through. She could’ve tied a note to the back of a bloody tortoise and the thing would’ve turned up by now.” He sucked in a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Everyone always said she was too good for me. I was punching above my weight. And that was when I still had ten fingers.” He lifted his hand and stared at the nubs of gristle. “I know she’s found someone else. I’ve even hired someone to prove it.”

“You hired someone?” I shuffled on the gravel and peered sideways at him. “What, to spy on her?”

“Something like that. Got an old friend in the area, he was too sickly to sign up. Earns a living doing women’s work, stitching and sewing, stuff like that. He’s going to keep an eye on her for a few bob, see what she gets up to.”

“Right,” I said, “good idea.” What I actually thought was the poor bastard’s losing his mind, but he probably wasn’t too keen to hear that right now.

I was about to close my eyes and try my best to enjoy the tenth rendition tonight of *The Ants Go Marching*, when there came a sudden, terrifying screeching sound from somewhere close behind. I jerked upright and turned to peer over my shoulder, just in time to see two fiercely bright headlights powering towards me. The violin and background noise was silenced, replaced by the guttural roar of the car’s engine and the crunch of the shingle underneath its wheels. For half a second I was as stiff as a board, frozen in place by sheer terror. Then some kind of survival instinct kicked in and my muscles suddenly thawed. I pushed myself off the ground and leapt over Shaw, crashing shoulder-first into the ground as the car’s bumper slammed into the rock we’d been using as a card table. The entire vehicle lifted, the front wheel still spinning in the air just three feet from our faces, until finally the engine died and the headlights cut out. I blinked against the sudden darkness, my throat rasping with every frantic breath I sucked in.

“Bugger me,” Shaw said, sucking back more of his wine. He rubbed the residue from his lips and shook his head. “That was almost us done. All three of us in one bloody day.”

I was already back on my feet, moving towards the driver’s door with three other men who’d narrowly missed being flattened. I ordered them back and then prised open the door, peering inside. A soldier was slumped over the steering wheel, grunting and muttering to himself.

“Hey,” I said, grabbing him by the arm and shaking hard. His head swivelled towards me and his eyes shone as the fire caught them, wide and wild. A moment later he was staggering free and I saw who it was. Lieutenant James Turner. His face was twisted in a manic, almost animalistic snarl and I stepped backwards just before he lashed out at me,

his fist slashing the air just an inch from my jaw. “Jesus, Turner,” I yelled at him. “What the hell’s wrong with you?”

“Bastards,” he grunted, finding his balance and lunging at me again. My heart was still pumping far too fast and I felt the familiar dizzy sickness take a hold, a copper taste spreading across my tongue, but somehow I managed to hook his arm and twist him around, throwing him aside. Turner stumbled and slammed into another man, who promptly pushed him away and fired an almighty punch into Turner’s nose, dropping him like a rock. The crunching sound was truly hideous, leaving no doubt that at least one bone in his face was broken. I thought that would be the end of it, so I bent forwards and dropped my hands onto my knees and sucked in three long, shuddering breaths, but when I glanced up again Turner was staggering back to his feet. Blood was streaming from both nostrils, smearing across his lips and his chin, but he didn’t even seem to notice. He just swung around on the spot, glaring at each of us in turn. “Bastards,” he muttered again, spitting blood at us.

“He’s high as a fucking kite,” one of the others said, backing off a step. I held my ground and raised both arms, my palms spread towards Turner.

“Hey, Turner, listen to me. We’re on your side, alright? Just calm down, okay?” The glare hit me and I braced myself for another attack, but for now he just stood there, shaking and dripping. I swallowed back the acid creeping up my throat and blinked hard. “What’s wrong, Turner? Did you take something?”

“The hell with you all,” Turner screamed, then he bolted to his right, cutting between myself and the car. I watched, incredulous, as he sprinted towards the lake. As soon as I realised he wasn’t going to stop, his boots splashing across the shallow water, I cursed and took off after him, chasing his silhouette into the lake. The moment the ice cold water seeped through my trousers and hit my flesh, I gasped and almost shuddered to a standstill. I honestly thought I might pass out and drown right there and then, but somehow I kept on going, my legs ploughing through the freezing, pitch black body. I couldn’t really see him any longer, but I could hear him thrashing around just a few feet ahead.



“Bloody mad bastard!” I yelled after him, before I threw myself into the drink. The shock was intense, a truly horrible experience. My heart actually felt like it had burst free from my chest and my lungs seemed to shrivel up, unable to suck in any more air. I croaked and gasped, fighting against the freezing wall of water. He was just in front of me now, I could feel his arms and legs kicking. A wave smashed into my face and the slimy liquid forced itself down my throat, making me gag and puke it straight back up. My chest ached like someone was sat on it and I was still spluttering when my hand shot out and grabbed the bastard by his collar. Slowly I started to drag him back to shore.

Some of the other men had waded in up to their waists and were waiting to grab a hold of Turner and help him back onto dry land. I let them take him and concentrated on staggering back myself, still gasping for breath. Everything that had just happened already seemed like some kind of crazy hallucination. I was shivering violently, my vision blurring as I staggered towards the nearest fire, just a fierce orange blur to my waterlogged eyeballs, and dropped onto my knees in front of it. The heat washed over me, but still barely penetrated the ice cold clothes that clung to my skin.

“Jesus, King.” I glanced across at Shaw as he slumped down beside me, still clutching his wine. “You’re an absolute animal,” he said.

“G-go check on Turner,” I said, rubbing my hands in front of the fire. Shaw gulped back some of the wine, then held the half-full bottle out to me. I stared at it for a while, then snatched it up and drank.

“That should help,” Shaw said, struggling up to his feet. “I’ll shove Turner in one of them cells for the night. Needs to sleep some kind of shit off, that’s for sure.” He patted me on my shoulder and wandered towards the gathering, leaving me dripping and trembling.

The fire rippled and swirled in front of me and I felt the darkness creeping in at the edges. It had taken its time but it was coming fast now, bright spots popping behind my eyes and that distant ringing lodged in my ears. I’d already had two today, but the hell with it. I needed more medicine. I reached inside my jacket, fumbled through the sopping wet material until I found the pocket. My hand delved inside, fingers burrowing down until they touched the bottom. No magic pills.

My insides felt like they were burning and the veins at my temples were poking hard through the skin. I groped around in the pocket some more, in case the tiny plastic bottle had somehow wedged itself into some non-existent crevice. Then I pulled off my jacket and laid it out beside me, fighting back the darkness. My palms padded across the lining, searching for a lump. Still nothing.

"Shit, bollocks, arse. Damn you, Turner, you mental prick." I collapsed onto my back, feeling the tiny jagged rocks poke into my spine, but even that discomfort felt strangely distant. Far above me, the clouds had parted to reveal a sheet of stars. I tried to focus on them and concentrated on slowing my breath, my hands crushed across my chest, fingers interlocked.

For a while I was certain I was about to pass out and the only comforting thought was that at least if I pissed myself, my trousers were too soaked for anyone to notice. Chalk it up to exertion. But then something strange happened. The stars were suddenly obscured by a face and as my eyes focused on the young, feminine features, I realised that it was a hallucination of the girl I'd met earlier, the one Jurgen had grabbed for a human shield. The one I'd skimmed a bullet off in my godforsaken state.

*Katherine, that was her name.*

I smiled up at her and she smiled back, but she looked kind of sad. I wanted to tell her not to worry. After all, she was just a hallucination, a figment of my diseased brain manifest in an impressively realistic form. But before I could, I heard a heavy panting over my head and then something damp and slimy was vigorously rubbing my left cheek.

"No, Katz!" the hallucination said. I couldn't tell what was happening, but before I could protest, the slimy thing disappeared and something heavy and furry collapsed onto my face. I tried to yell but the fur got in my mouth, choking me. Then, as quickly as it happened, the bulk was gone again. I coughed and spat, scrambling up onto my elbows, and when I peered across I saw Katherine stood beside an enormous German Shepherd. Both girl and dog regarded me with a sheepish look.

"You're not a hallucination," I croaked and Katherine shook her head.

"I'm sorry," she said, hugging the dog. "I was just seeing if you were well."

"I'm alright, thanks. What are you doing here?"

"He ran out," Katherine said, staring down at the dog. "This is Katz. He's wild but he's friendly. I'm sorry he licked your face." She peered at me and probed a cut on her upper lip with her tongue. "I saw what you did. Pulling the crazy man back out."

"Wish I'd let the mad bastard drown," I said. Katz the dog nodded his enormous furry head and for a strange, brief moment it was like the bugger understood. Then his head dipped down and he started to drag his tongue across his bollocks instead. "How's your arm?" I asked, pushing up onto my feet. Katherine pouted and her hand moved to her shoulder.

"It's fine," she replied, dropping her gaze. I stepped towards her and reached out, gripping her sleeve and easing it up her arm. An angry red gash stared back, carved into her flesh. Part of the scab had broken and a trickle of blood had squeezed out and smeared across her skin. Katherine winced and pulled away and Katz interrupted his ball licking to stare up at me. I could clearly read the warning in his eyes and I stepped away again.

"That's not fine," I said. "You need it cleaned up and bandaged or it'll rot and fall off."

She started to protest, but I cut her off and persuaded her to follow me to the doc's surgery. At this time he would be passed out by the lake with half of the squadron, but he never bothered to lock the main door so we just breezed on inside. I helped myself to the first aid kit and did a patchy job of cleaning and wrapping up the wound, although Katherine had to finish up as Katz was beginning to get antsy over me touching her. With teeth the size of my little finger on show, I wasn't about to argue with him.

"All done," I said when the pin was in place. "Right, come on, let's get you home before your parents lynch me." She stayed quiet, but I could tell by her expression that I'd hit a raw nerve and I suddenly realised why. "Shit," I muttered, folding my arms. "You don't have any parents, do you?" Katherine shook her head and sniffed, scratching Katz on the side of his face.

"Sometimes I pretend that my mother is still here with me," she said, peering up. "But it's just me and Katz now."

By the time we started down the central road, my uniform was starting to dry off and my heart no longer felt like it might pinball up my throat and out of my mouth. Katherine led the way towards her home and I wondered if I should pry some more into her family history. In the end, I decided why the hell not.

"What happened to them?" I asked her and she glanced across.

"My mother and father?"

"Yeah. Was it the Nazis?"

"Mmm." She nodded slowly, her brow creasing. Her foot lashed out at a stone and sent it skimming across the street. "My father helped a Jewish friend to escape across the border. The Nazis must have found out. One day when I was playing with my friends, the soldiers came and took my parents away. That was the last I saw them, but I know what happened. My friend Thomas told me about the camps, what they do to the prisoners there."

"So you've just been living by yourself? How long now?"

"I don't know," Katherine said with a shrug. "It was last spring when my parents were taken. So over a year."

"Jesus Christ. What do you do for food?"

"Some things I can find myself. Berries and fruit mostly. The other people in the town, they help me too, give me things to eat. But not much food now, so they don't help as much."

"You're a tough lass," I told her, but I was glad she had that enormous mutt with her too. Everyone needs a guardian angel of some sort to help them struggle through the shitheap of life. She must have read my thoughts, because she reached out to Katz and ground her knuckles into his head.

"I don't know what I'd do without him for company," she said and Katz barked twice, his huge tongue unrolling and lolling back and forth.

"You had him long?" I asked. Katherine nodded.

“Since he was young. I was walking through the woods one day and I heard him howling. He was with his mother, but she was wounded bad. It looked like someone shot her in her belly. She was bleeding everywhere. I tried to stroke her and calm her down, but she snapped at me, tried to bite my arm. She was making this noise.” Katherine imitated the sound, a high-pitched whine that I’d heard once before from a dying guard dog. “She was in so much pain, I had to finish her off.”

“Finish her off? You killed her?”

“I found a rock about this big.” She held her hands about two feet apart, her expression turning sour. “It was so heavy I could barely lift it. But I managed to get it up over my head, then I threw it down onto her skull. She stopped making the noise just before I did it. She looked up at me and she knew what I was going to do. I almost stopped, but I could see in her eyes. She wanted it to end.”

“Bloody hell,” I muttered, blowing out a breath. “I don’t think I could’ve done it.”

“But you killed a man today,” she said and I frowned.

“That’s different. I’ve shot plenty of men in my time, but no one who wasn’t ready to kill me first. It’s survival, that’s all. You don’t have a choice.”

“So you wouldn’t kill someone even if they were in terrible pain, to end their misery?” Katherine was staring up at me curiously and I sighed and rubbed the back of my neck.

“I don’t know if I could. The men I’ve killed, I did it without thinking. You’re on automatic, like it’s not even you pulling the trigger. If I had to consciously murder another living being...I just don’t know if I could do it.”

Katherine led us around the lake, where the rest of the squad continued to drink and squabble, then up to the edge of the woods. It was pitch black behind the curtain of trees and unsettlingly silent. I couldn’t shake the feeling that there were all kinds of creatures staring out at me, willing me inside.

“I normally walk through,” Katherine said, “but it’s too dark now.”

“Will it take long to walk around?” I asked.

“Not long. But I can find the way myself.”

“No, come on, I’ll see you to the door. It’s far too late for a young lass to be walking ‘round alone, dog or no dog.” I couldn’t help but picture the old man, Schmidt, lying on his own bloody kitchen floor with his brains dashed across the room. Of course, it wasn’t all concern that made me agree to be her escort. Part of me, some kind of morbid curiosity, wanted to see whatever place this girl was calling home. And luckily she consented, because otherwise we probably wouldn’t have made our gruesome discovery for only God knows how long.

So we set off again, skirting around the trees until we came to the main road, which cut right through the woods and led on out of town. There’d been almost no traffic running in and out of Rottstein since the occupation, even in the heat of day, so at this time the road was completely dead. My close call with Turner’s bumper was still far too fresh in my mind, however, so we walked right at the edge of the road, Katz trotting along just ahead of us. Katherine had settled into complete silence so I kept my trap shut and hummed old songs in my head, those jazzy numbers that mum played every evening as she cooked and cleaned.

Our peace was disturbed when we were just half a mile or so along the road. Katz suddenly stopped ahead of us, his head rising to the stars and his ears twitching before he suddenly tore off to his left, charging into the trees. I watched him disappear into the darkness.

“What’s up with him?” I asked and Katherine sighed.

“He likes to chase small animals. Squirrels and rabbits and birds.” A mournful howling sound drifted from the woods and Katherine stopped, her pale features creasing in the glimmer of moonlight. “He never makes a noise like that,” she said. I stared at the silhouettes of the ancient oaks and listened to that awful baying. The mutt was only a hundred yards or so inside, his protests coming through loud and clear.

“I’ll go take a look,” I said, my hand moving automatically to my service revolver, just checking that it was still locked in the holster. The thing

would've been soaked when I leapt into the lake, so I had no idea if it would even fire any more, but then what possible dangers could be lurking in a cluster of trees on the edge of town? It's not like Germany had any bloody bears knocking around.

I stepped off the road and carefully pushed between two of the oaks, crushing weeds and snapping chunks of dead wood beneath my boots. I couldn't see more than five foot in front of my face and my feet were just a blur down below, so almost immediately I stumbled over some roots and almost crashed to the ground. Swearing and huffing, I managed to grab a fistful of bark and just kept myself from going over.

"Best day of my whole bloody life," I grunted, easing forwards again. Katz was somewhere ahead, still howling non-stop. I followed the noise, my stomach churning violently. "What the hell's wrong with you, eh? Look at you, wiggling out over some dark forest and a whining dog. Get a bloody grip." Sadly my pep talk did nothing to calm my nerves. Sweat was dripping down my forehead and I almost cried out when some tiny thing dashed across the ground beside me, chattering angrily. Even though I could barely see anything, I quickened my pace until I was practically right on top of Katz. There I paused and tried to catch my breath, one hand clutched to my chest. When I was ready, I slowly reached out and wriggled my fingers, hoping to Christ that the mental mutt wouldn't chomp them off. "Katz, hey, what's up there? You okay?" I was still panting when my fingertips finally brushed his fur and I felt him twist, then his face was just two feet in front of mine, his eyes gleaming as the dark orbs caught the tiny shreds of light. He kept on howling and I smelled the raw meat on his breath. I wondered if he'd caught some hapless bit of wildlife, but then why would the dumb dog be braying about it?

From back on the road I heard Katherine calling out to me, but her words were drowned out by the endless noise. I grunted and dared to curl my arm around Katz's neck, hoping to push him around and back towards his master. I managed to move him an inch before he squirmed free. His mighty head rammed me in the stomach and in surprise I staggered backwards, my heel catching against another root. My hands thrashed out but found nothing to grab and I slammed back against a tree, jarring my shoulder before tumbling onto my side. Katz tore off again through the woods, barking incessantly.

“Bloody dog,” I whispered to myself, the left side of my face pressed into the dirt. I lay there for a little while, damp and aching and suddenly exhausted, until I heard Katherine calling to me again. Then I shifted my arm and got ready to push myself up again.

My hand pressed down on something soft, most definitely not a root or anything else I’d imagine would be lying out here. It was fleshy, but too cold to belong to anything alive. My first thought was of Katz and my original theory, that he’d successfully chased and killed something. But the skin was bare, like a human’s. No fur or hair to speak of. I removed my hand and edged closer, dread pouring through my soul again. I had to move my face just a few inches away and squint hard before I could make out the vague silhouette, and when I saw what it was, I almost leapt away in shock.

Even in the shroud of darkness, there was no mistaking the pale female face that stared lifelessly back at me, mouth stretched wide in terror.

## **Four (Emily)**

Father was as stubborn as a bull again, refusing to let me help him get ready for bed, so I waited outside his bedroom door while he crashed around inside and cursed himself silly. Even after all of his falls, all of the broken bones and everything else, he demanded I keep my distance. As if having a woman do anything at all for him would somehow strip him of his dignity. The one time I’d stormed in and bellowed that I was going to help him whether he liked it or not, he’d hurled his walking stick at my head. Crafty old sod sure could find some strength when he needed it.

“Fine,” he eventually called out, after destroying half of the room by the sounds of it. “You can come in!”

“Here I come,” I said with a sigh, twisting the handle and stepping inside. As usual, the room was lit by a single candle, propped up in an old brass tin beside his bed. The flickering flame highlighted every last crag on my father’s face. He was sat on his bed with his pyjamas on, although I noticed



that his cotton trousers were on backwards. I had to bite my lip and force myself to remain silent as I strode over and straightened his shirt, until he batted my hand away with a roll of his eyes.

“Okay, that’s enough fussing,” he said, staring up at me. “I’m not a child.”

“No,” I breathed, “you just act like one a lot.” That forced a smile from him and he shook his head.

“Fear not, daughter. I’ll be in my grave before you know it, then you’ll finally have some peace.”

“Oh, for god’s sakes, stop it with the morbid comments! You’ll live to a hundred and harass me every damn day until then!” I ordered him to lay back, then I pulled his blanket up to his chest and let him settle in. He stared at me the whole time, with that goofy amused expression he always threw on when I scolded him.

“You know why I make you mad?” he asked and I peered back at him.

“Yes, papa, you’ve told me a hundred times. Because I look like mama when I’m cross.” Father beamed at that, the crags on his face growing deeper.

“You’ve got the same pout as her,” he chuckled. “I saw that pout every damn day.”

“Uh huh. Come on, lay back and stop fidgeting before you give me an ulcer. Then I’ll do more than just pout.” Thankfully he did as he was told for once in his life and I made sure he was comfortable before fetching him a glass of water. When I returned to his bedroom, my jaw clenched. Through our paper-thin walls drifted the unmistakable strains of the couple next door, engaged in rather passionate lovemaking. Either that or they were beating the living excrement out of each other. Dad was listening to the banging and yelling with a sour expression, his arms folded across the top of his blanket.

“Why do they have to be so damn loud,” he muttered. “And almost every night this week! It’s a bitter blow for useless old lumps like me, with my loving days behind me.”

“Don’t stress over it,” I said, placing the glass in easy reaching distance. “At least it never lasts long.” He grumbled something to himself and I kissed him on his forehead before blowing out the candle and leaving with an exhausted ‘good night, papa’.

I trudged back downstairs and started clearing up, my muscles so stiff that I could have just seized up where I stood like a living statue. My thoughts were hooked on a hot sponge bath. It had been another rough day, lots of heavy lifting and dragging, so I decided to hell with it. I’d treat myself for the third evening in a row. I filled every huge pot we owned with water and stuck them all on the stove to boil, before dragging the metal tub from the cupboard into the middle of the kitchen. Then I hung up the pile of damp washing while I waited. Ten minutes later, I was pouring the hot water into our tub and inhaling the steam that gushed up into my face, relishing the warming, cleansing sensation as the vapours filled my chest.

“Bliss,” I muttered, shrugging off my clothes and easing myself into the tub. The water barely came up to my midriff but I splashed it up over the rest of my body, rubbing the heat all over until my skin was a deep pink. Suddenly I felt human again, closing my eyes and resting my head back against the metal rim.

I’d just begun to drift away when a sudden sound from just outside snapped me back into consciousness. I sat up and peered out through the kitchen window, but all I could see was darkness and the reflection of the tiny lamp sat up on the dining table. For a moment I was ready to dismiss it as a wild dog or some other animal stalking around in search of stray food, but then I heard what sounded like a man’s voice. He was speaking in a hushed but frantic tone. Even then, I thought that it might be one of our neighbours; our back garden is shared with the other houses in the row, just one big open space that anyone can use. But then I realised with horror that the man was speaking in English.

Immediately I leapt from the tub and snatched up my towel, wrapping it tight around my body. A heartbeat later I was at the back door clutching a ten-inch carving knife, leaning out into the night. My gaze fell on two men dressed in uniform, skulking in the shadows at the other end of the garden. One of them looked to have snagged himself on the barbed wire that topped the fence. He’d ripped half of it down when he’d come over and it was still

curled tight around his leg, slicing into his flesh through his trousers. The man was swearing and bleating while his partner told him to shut up and keep still, or words to that effect. I watched them for a moment, hesitating to get involved, but the thought of these soldiers invading our space had stoked a fire in my gut. I stepped out onto the cool stone and sucked in a breath.

“What do you think you are doing,” I demanded in English. They immediately turned towards me and lapsed into silence, although the injured one continued to rock back and forth, clutching his bleeding leg. Eventually his partner rose and stepped towards me. When I saw the tiniest little smile on his face, like the whole thing was just one big joke, I felt like running over and pressing the carving knife up to his throat. See how funny he found it all then.

“Don’t worry about this,” he said, tilting his head to one side. He was a brute, about six feet of muscle and clearly most of it was packed inside his skull. His black eyes sparkled as they caught the light from the window. “Just got a little lost, that’s all. I’ll get my mate here out and we’ll be on our way.”

“He’s bleeding all over the place,” I spat back, jabbing the blade at the helpless idiot. Even in the faint light, I could see the blood spatters all over the grass. Muscle boy shrugged.

“That’s why I need to cut him free. Here, give me that knife.” He strode towards me with his hand held out and I shook my head vigorously, feeling my cheeks flush.

“Stay back! Get away from me!” But he kept on coming and I had a simple choice. Either lash out at him, try and cut him deep enough to make him think twice, or just hold my ground. Before I even had a chance to decide, he was on me. His bulk pressed against me and his enormous hand curled around my wrist, pulling my arm to the side. A second later he had the knife. I recoiled and lashed out with my other hand, slapping him hard across his face. He let go of me, staggering back and dragging a sleeve across his eyes. Then he glared at me and bared his teeth.

“What the fuck did you do that for?” he hissed and I pressed myself back against the wall, feeling the open doorway at my side. My heart was

hammering inside my chest and my wrist throbbed from where he'd grabbed me.

"What are you going to do," I whispered back, raising my chin. "Stab me?" The soldier stared back through narrowed eyes, the blade still clutched in his fist. He was about to speak when his friend yelled out loud enough to wake up the whole street.

"Oh, Jesus, hurry up, will ya! I'm pissing blood out my leg here!"

"Alright Mick," the muscle boy called back over his shoulder. Then he turned away and strode across the garden before kneeling beside his partner. He gripped a length of the barbed wire and took the blade to it and I frowned.

"You can't cut that wire with a knife," I said, but he began to saw back and forth all the same and a moment later the wire snapped and sprang apart in his hands. He swore, stabbing the knife into the ground before slowly uncoiling the rest of it from around the injured man's leg.

By now, all of the noise and yelling had attracted attention from the other houses in the row. Friedrich and Hetti from next door were leaning out of their bedroom window, Hetti's modesty concealed only by her blanket, and that was when I remembered I was wearing nothing but my towel. I slipped back inside the house and closed the door and returned to the kitchen, pulling the curtains closed. By the time I'd donned my dress and peered outside again, the soldiers had disappeared.

"Emily," my father called from upstairs. "Emily, was there someone outside?" I stared across the garden at the tangle of broken, rusted wire and the knife, still embedded in the soil.

"It's okay," I shouted back. "They're gone now."

## **Five (Adam)**

I made Katherine come back to the lake with me, half because I couldn't leave her alone after what I'd seen, and half because having her and Katz close by helped to calm me just a little. All the same, I felt the empty spot in my jacket where my pill case usually probed my chest and once again cursed Turner's name.

Already the gathering was starting to break apart, some soldiers heading back to camp while others lingered by the water's edge. I was a little relieved to note that the violin player had finally buggered off. Most of the fires had burned themselves out, now just embers and smoke, although the one that I'd warmed myself by was still going strong. By its orange glow I saw four men huddled around Turner's car, one leaning against the smashed bumper.

"Right," I said to Katherine. "I'll grab who I can and head on back. You stay here with the others, alright?"

"No," she said, matter-of-factly. I glanced at her, one eyebrow raised.

"What do you mean, no?"

"I mean, no. How will you find the body again without Katz?"

"I..." Well, she had me there. I'd stumbled out of there in such a rush, cursing and raging and almost braying myself on about ten more roots, that I hadn't bothered to leave any kind of marker. Katz was my only chance to find her again tonight without a full-on hunt and I figured he wouldn't be too cooperative without Katherine at our side. "Okay, smartie pants, you can come. But when we find the body, I'm sending you back with someone."

I left Katherine and Katz with the soldiers by the car and rushed back into town. My first stop was the makeshift office I shared with Shaw and Lane. Right now it was little more than a room with three desks, three chairs and a cupboard full of junk, but we spent so little time in here that it didn't really matter. Lane's desk was the only one that had anything on it, a stubby red hibiscus in a pot. I stared at the plant and the empty desk for a moment, before crossing to the cupboard. As soon as I threw it open, I saw what I needed. I snatched up the torch sat on the top shelf, brushing the

rubber grip against my almost-dry uniform to remove the coating of dust, then I tore back out of the room and headed for the cells next door.

The Nazis had shipped their unfortunate captives out of town while they occupied the place, so the only prison to speak of was a disused brick building containing three barred and bare chambers. We'd only used them a couple of times since our own occupation, mostly for our own soldiers when they got a little too drunk and rowdy. When I jogged in through the unlocked door, the only occupant was Turner. The mad wretch was slumped in a corner of his tiny cell with only a thin carpet of hay to pad the stone floor. He was rocking back and forth, his head lodged between his knees.

"Oi," I said, rapping on the bars. No response. As far as I could tell he was muttering to himself, but chances were it was just absolute gibberish, so I turned and hurried back out of the building.

I found the man I was looking for just outside, or rather I almost ran straight into the bastard. Shaw was just rounding the corner with a cigarette – one of *my* cigarettes – dangling from his lips, just as I slipped back outside. I pulled short just in time and breathed out.

"Shaw, Jesus, you scared the living shit out of me."

"Surprised there's any left in you," he said with a smile, "after that daft bastard almost ran us down."

"You've got to come with me, right now," I said, grabbing his arm and dragging him back around the makeshift prison. He staggered after me, almost dropping his fag.

"Woah, hey, what's all this about?"

"I found a body, in the woods. The dog, the dog found it and I just tripped over the fucking thing." I realised I was yammering on but I couldn't help myself. An overdose of adrenaline was pumping through my entire body, giving me the shakes and making my tongue run ahead of me.

"Body? You mean a dead body?"

"Aye, of course, a dead body. A woman, a young woman. I couldn't see who it was, it was too bloody dark, but she was dead for sure. We need to take the dog and more men and go find her again." I staggered and twisted

around, staring him in the eye. “Shit, the doc, we need the doc an’ all. He’ll know what to do.”

“What can the doc do?” Shaw asked. “If the poor bugger’s dead, that’s it. Bury her and send ‘er off with a farewell whiskey.”

“No, Jesus,” I said, grabbing him by the shoulder and squeezing tight. “We can’t just bury her. It’s murder! We’ve got to gather evidence, find out what happened.”

“How do you know it’s murder?” he asked, his face creasing. “You said you could barely see her.”

“Of course it’s a murder. Why would someone just go out to the woods and drop dead?”

“Well, maybe it’s just some girl who was caught in the crossfire when we took the town. Crawled into the woods and died right there where you found ‘em.”

“No, it’s too fresh. There was still some warmth, for god’s sake. Whoever it is, they died today. Maybe just an hour or two before I stumbled across her.”

“Jesus Christ,” Shaw said, his shoulders slumping. “Two murders in one day? I need a bloody drink.”

“Three murders,” I replied, eyes narrowed. “You forgetting Lane?” Shaw swept a hand through his hair and sighed.

“Three murders, right. Make that drink a double.”

We hurried to the lake and recruited two other volunteers, Second Lieutenant Moss and Private Kali, to come help us find the corpse. Kali was even drunker than Shaw, but at least the bastard could walk and Katz seemed to actually like him. The mutt was dancing around his legs when we showed up, his tongue flopping all over the place. I left them all whooping and laughing at Katz’s antics while I scuttled off in search of the doc, eventually finding him sat by himself with a book spread open on his lap and a miniature torch clasped in his hand. He was so lost in the thing that he jerked in surprise when I called his name.

“What is it?” he asked, folding a corner of the page he was on and closing the book before jumping to his feet. His tone was the usual cocktail of irritation, anger and exhaustion that I’d come to know and love. For someone tasked with saving human lives, the doc sure didn’t enjoy spending any time with his fellow man. I got the feeling he’d be entirely satisfied if the entire species just died out and left him alone to enjoy his two favourite pastimes: reading and smoking.

“Body,” I gasped, realising that I was out of breath again. I paused to fight down some air, which made the doc sigh and cross his arms.

“Body? Which one? What the bloody hell’s wrong, King, for God’s sakes?”

“In the woods. A new one.” I couldn’t make out his face to see realisation dawn, but when he opened his mouth again, his tone had softened.

“Right. Anyone we know?”

“I don’t know, couldn’t see. All I know is it’s a young woman.”

“And she’s definitely dead?” the doc asked. I nodded.

“Aye, definitely dead. You’ve got to come.”

“What do you want me to do exactly?” The irritation was seeping back. “If she’s dead, she’s slightly beyond my help.”

“We’ll need to know how she died,” I said, starting to feel slightly exasperated myself. “You’ll spot things we might miss, any clues that might help us figure out who did it.”

“Bloody hell, King. I’m a fucking medical student, not a fucking pathologist.” He jabbed a corner of his book into my shoulder. “You know what I was learning when I was drafted into this godforsaken squad? How to diagnose a fucking whooping cough. For the last three years I’ve been forced to do shit I never even trained for, it’s a miracle I haven’t killed off more people than I saved.”

“Well then,” I barked back, “if you’re used to doing things a little out of your comfort zone, what’s your problem?” That seemed to silence him, at least for a moment, so I spoke up again while I had the chance. “Look, I just



need you to take a look. Please. Then I'll leave you in peace. It's a five minute walk away, that's all." I could feel the doc's eyes burning into me but eventually he sighed and tucked the book into his jacket.

"Fine, come on then you maddening bastard, let's get this bloody well over with."

We all set off towards the woods, the five of us plus Katherine and Katz and I filled them in while we walked, my torch lighting up the damp soil ahead of us, turning the ground a brilliant yellow as if we were trekking across sand. The others listened to the whole story, the only interruption coming from Kali's occasional burst of wind. When I was done, Moss patted me on the shoulder.

"You've really been through it all today, eh?" he said. "I mean, what's the chances of you stumbling across that body? Weren't for this dog, I doubt anyone would've found it."

"I guess not," I replied, watching Katz dart in a zig-zag up ahead of us.

"Maybe you should recruit that thing," Moss continued. "Lane's replacement. Seems to have a nose for it."

"Pretty poor taste to talk about replacements so soon," the doc said. "The man's still lying on that slab, not even dead a day." Moss cleared his throat.

"Didn't mean any offence, it was just a joke. You lads aren't offended, are you?" He slapped me lightly on the arm and I ground my teeth.

"No. But I'd rather not talk about it."

"Alright then," Moss said. He took a deep breath, then just kept on going. "So, what are you going to do with Turner after his little stunt tonight?"

"Mental bastard," Kali croaked.

"He was completely shitbrained," Shaw said with a shake of his head. "Couldn't understand a word that came spewing out of his mouth. I was close to just knocking him down and dragging him to his cell."

"Somebody else already tried that," I said. "He got right back up and tried to drown himself in the lake."

“What’d he been drinking?” Kali asked and I couldn’t help but wonder if the big man was taking notes. He almost sounded envious of the crazy prick.

“Breath smelled of vodka. He must’ve downed a bottle on his own to get that messed up.”

“So what are you going to do with him?” Moss repeated. “Slam down the hammer of justice for almost crushing your skulls?”

“We’ve got some ideas,” I said, although in truth I had none at all. I hadn’t even thought about it, after everything that had happened. All I knew is that we couldn’t just wait until he sobered up, which might well be half a week from now, before letting him go. Releasing him with no punishment would be like handing out a free pass to every soldier in Rottstein, to do what the hell they wanted. Already the drinking was getting out of control. If things kept up, the entire town would be ash and timbers come autumn.

When we hit the road the mood turned more sombre, as we collectively anticipated the horrors to come. Katz trotted just ahead of us as usual and I prayed that he would pick up the scent and go to the woman again. Sure enough, just a quarter of a mile down the road he stopped at the edge and lifted his head, peering into the darkness. A high-pitched whimper filled the air.

“Right,” I said, aiming the torch into the trees. “She’s just in there. Kali, Moss, you stay here with the girl and the dog. Rest of you, follow close behind, alright, and mind the bloody roots. I almost brained myself on the bastards last time ‘round.”

Slowly I pressed into the woods, stamping down any thorns and brambles. I swept the torch beam left and right, sweeping the area as best I could and trying to remember how far in she was. Tell the truth, I had no idea. I was stumbling blind on my way in and shifting arse blind on my way out. Just behind me, twigs snapped and leaves shook as Shaw and the doc kept up.

“Somewhere ‘round here,” I called back. Deeper and deeper we pushed, until I was almost certain that we must’ve already gone past her. But then my light caught a flicker of movement up ahead and I almost dropped the

bloody torch in shock, my stomach lurching halfway up my throat. I focused the beam and saw two glowing red eyes staring back at me. “Jesus fucking Christ,” I muttered.

“What,” Shaw said, pushing up next to me. “What is it?”

“Bloody fox.” The eyes blinked and then disappeared as the furry bastard twisted around and tore off into the undergrowth. For a moment I stood there, swallowing back the bile. Cold sweat was sheeting down my back, soaking into my freshly-dried shirt. The itching sensation was all I could concentrate on, until the doc piped up.

“What are we stopped for, for Christ’s sakes? I’ve got a dozen fucking ants crawling up my leg.” Beside me, Shaw squeezed my arm and breathed wine vapours into my face.

“Come on then, chief. Let’s find this dead girl before the local wildlife carries her off.”

“Aye.” I sucked down a breath and took a second to gather my thoughts, but before I moved on I noticed something caught in the torch beam, just below where the fox had been stood. It was a red coat, half trampled into the dirt. I hesitated, then slowly stepped towards the thing.

Ten feet away, I saw her. She was spread out on her back, just beyond the coat, her limbs splayed out like some kind of dismembered puppet cut free from its strings and her head twisted to the side, eyes locked right on me. When I saw that face again, the look of terror, my heart collapsed into my guts. But that wasn’t even the worst of it, not even the fact that someone had torn her clothes off and scattered them all around the body. I realised now that I recognised the girl. The pale features, those golden curls, even the red coat she’d been wearing.

“Oh, Christ,” I grunted, feeling my legs begin to tremble again. Shaw came to my side, peering over my shoulder at the horror spread out before us.

“Bloody hell,” he said, exhaling sharply. “That’s another one for the nightmare bank.”

“I know who she is,” I told him. “Her name’s LORIETT. She’s Herr Schmidt’s granddaughter.”

“Schmidt?” He paused for moment, until the wires finally connected. “Oh, shit, the old man who had his head smashed in this morning?”

“That’s the one.” To our left, the doc stumbled around a tree, cursing and shaking his head, then he staggered to a halt when he spotted the girl. He shone his own torch in her direction, throwing shadows across the undergrowth. Together, the three of us paused and soaked up the scene. Too horrible to take in, but too horrible to look away at the same bloody time.

It’s funny, really, when you think after everything that’s happened. We’ve seen our friends and fellow soldiers killed right beside us, over and over. I know only too well that look of terror as someone’s lights fade and then snap out for good. I’ve cradled far too many heads and fed the poor wretches shite about everything being okay, just go towards the light and get the hell away from all this horror. But something about this murder, and the killing of Herr Schmidt this morning, just felt different. This wasn’t death in battle, kill or be killed. I had a feeling it wasn’t even a killing in desperation, like poor old Laney. I knew just from the look on her face, the expression that screamed betrayal, that this was cold-hearted murder.

“At least we know for sure it’s a fresh killing,” I said, my voice somehow sounding obscene as it cut through the silence. “I saw her alive and well just a few hours ago, coming out of the morgue.” The shaking was getting worse, until I had to lean against a tree and tear my gaze away. Same thing as earlier, the panic rushing in through every bloody pore, making me shiver and slowly turn numb. Only this time there was no toilet to hide in.

“She almost looks alive still,” Shaw said, cautiously stepping forwards. The doc did the same, until they were stooped down at her side.

“How did she die?” I called out, forcing each word as my fingernails dug into the bark. Black spots popped in front of my eyes, heat spreading across my cheeks and down my neck.

“Looks like she was strangled,” the doc replied. “Only obvious marks on the body are deep bruises around her throat. Can’t see anything else.”

“She looks like she’s seen the goddamn devil himself,” Shaw said. I swallowed hard and glanced over again, peering at the crack of light between them. I could still see her face, those anguished eyes spread wide.

“You’re not fucking kidding,” the doc said. “Soil all over the body, but she’s just been left out here in the open. That’s a little strange.” I took another breath and forced myself to straighten up, then I pushed away from the tree and shuffled across on leaden legs.

“There’s a shallow pit just beside her,” Shaw said. “Maybe someone started to bury her, then changed their mind?”

“What about animals?” I asked, almost slurring my words. “Someone could have covered her up, then the foxes got her scent and dug her out again?”

“I don’t know,” the doc said. “Perhaps. I’d have thought there’d be more marks on the body though. Bite marks, scratches, things like that. Apart from the bruising, there’s nothing.”

“This is seriously fucked up,” Shaw muttered. “Where do we even begin?”

“We roughly know time of death,” I said, trying to shake the fog from my head. I knelt down beside the doc and forced myself to look at her again. “What about location. You think she was killed somewhere else, and then dumped here so no one would find her?”

“If that’s the case,” Shaw said, “We’re after someone with a car or some way of shifting the body out here.” He scratched his chin, then he turned to me with a disgusted look. “Bloody hell...but that means her killer dragged her out here, *then* they ripped all her clothes off after she was already dead.”

“Good point,” I muttered. Why the hell would someone drag a corpse out into the woods to dispose of it, then undress it before leaving it out in the open? That would take this thing to a whole new level of psychotic.

“The killer’s most likely a man too,” the doc interrupted, peering closely at Lorient’s throat. “A woman couldn’t have exerted that much pressure and left marks like those, unless she had hands like an ogre. The bruises are far too wide.”

“Alright,” I said, releasing a breath. “So two possible scenarios. First, a man killed her earlier this evening, then he brought her body here in some kind of vehicle, stripped her naked, maybe tried to bury her and then left again.” I rubbed my palm against my face, my skin smelling like earth. Thinking things over like this seemed to be helping a little. The sickness faded as my brain concentrated on this girl’s final hours, trying to piece together what led to her being stranded, naked and alone, in these woods. But I wasn’t satisfied with the picture we were sketching. “It just doesn’t fit,” I said, easing the torch beam over the scattered clothes. “Why take her clothes off after she’s dead, if all you’re trying to do is hide the body?”

“So maybe it’s the second scenario then,” Shaw said. “She wasn’t killed somewhere else, she was murdered right here.”

“Maybe she came out here with a lover,” I ventured. “Some kind of attempt to escape disapproving eyes and ears.” I mulled it over, wiping the sweat from my brow with a sleeve. Seemed somehow off that she’d be out here frolicking with a man so soon after the horrors of her grandfather’s brutal murder. The whole thing just didn’t feel right. For a moment I wondered if this was somehow linked to her grandfather’s death; surely it was too much of a coincidence, two family members dying like this in the same bloody day. But I shot Jurgen before Loriatt was killed, so he couldn’t possibly have been involved. Unless he was working with someone else, or...or else he’d been telling the truth. He really did just nick the old bastard’s food, after finding the swine with his head bashed in.

Suddenly I was aware of a bitter taste in my mouth, but when I tried to swallow it back, my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. I almost gagged, turning my head from Loriatt’s body to hack and cough until the cool air rushed back into my lungs. When I glanced at the doc, dabbing my lips with the back of my hand, I saw his face twist with concern.

Just then, we heard a voice calling out from back near the road. It sounded like Moss and he sounded upset. The others turned and peered through the trees but I quickly rose, leaning lightly against Shaw’s shoulder.

“I’ll check it out,” I said, stumbling back the way we’d come with my torch clutched in front of my chest. Somehow it seemed like twice the distance on the way back, just as it had earlier when I’d been lost in near total darkness, flailing wildly in a mad panic to get the hell away. Moss called out again when I was almost out and I yelled back, picking my way through a mesh of brambles.

“What is it, Moss? Everything alright?”

“We found something,” he answered. He was just ahead of me and a moment later my torch beam caught his jacket, billowing in the growing wind. I pushed free of the trees and strode up to him, my stomach clenching in anticipation of what was coming. Just one quick look at him told me it wasn’t good news. A severe expression had settled on his face and even Kali looked concerned, through his usual alcohol-fuelled stupor. Katherine

and Katz were messing around at the other side of the road, completely oblivious.

“Well, what is it?” I asked and Moss raised his arm and opened his fist. In his palm sat a golden eagle carved out of metal. The thing had an X carved over its eye, sloppy work most likely carried out with a pen knife. “What the hell is that?”

“It’s a trophy,” Moss said. “From the hundredth Nazi that Turner killed. He tore this thing off the bastard’s uniform and kept it for good luck.”

“I don’t understand,” I said, but the truth was already dawning on me. “You say you found this?”

“Just now.” Moss nodded, then he jabbed a finger at the dirt at the side of the road. “Right there.” He looked me in the eye and a feeling of pure dread struck me square in the gut. “Turner was right here, just a couple of hours ago. Just before he almost creamed you and Shaw with that car.”

“He’s the one,” Kali said, fingering his collar. “He’s the one what killed the girl.”

## **Six (Terry)**

You know the day’s going to be one almighty cunt when it starts with a visit to the Major. That stuffy prick’s had it in for me ever since I was transferred to his squad and I still haven’t got the slightest idea why. More kills than any other limp-wristed nancy in his outfit and no medals or commendations to show for it, like I give a flying fuck about any of that back-slapping bollocks anyway. Fuck the lot of ‘em, bunch of airy-fairy nob-slurping upper-crusts.

Course, I don’t want the old goat on my arse any more than he already is. So as soon as the word came through that he wanted to see me immediately, I dropped everything I was doing and headed straight over. After the obligatory fag break, of course. And a stop-off in the barracks to take my



second dump of the day. When the need grips you, you can't ignore it. Bad for your health to hold it, that's what the doc says.

This was my first time in the old bastard's office and I couldn't have pictured it any sweeter. The drippy fucker's got some dead animal heads poking out of the wall, like they sprinted at the thing and smashed through up to their necks. They still looked alive, staring down at you with suspicious expressions as you take a seat by the enormous desk. Major was looking red-eyed as usual and I couldn't help but wonder if he hated this place as much as I do. If he'd rather be out there fighting the krauts again, rather than sat around playing with his cock all day. Say what you will about the old fart, at least he had some bollocks stashed away in those flaccid pants of his.

"Second Lieutenant Wightman," he started, leaning towards me and clenching his fists on top of the desk. Here we fucking go, I thought. Straight down to the good stuff. Drop trou and bend over this desk, sonny.

"Yes, sir," I said, matching his cold, indifferent gaze.

"You're currently assigned to sentry duty," he continued and at this point I had to bite my tongue. Sentry duty, as he called it, basically involved me standing around by a pill box at the arse end of town, making sure that the Nazi army didn't suddenly magically resurrect itself and come marching back into the joint. I knew exactly what it was. A way of keeping me down, not to mention out of the fucking way. In other words, a steaming pile of shit.

"Yes, sir," I said, through my teeth.

"Not any more. You're reassigned to Captain King, taking over from the deceased Corporal Lane."

"King?" I could only imagine that my mug was a picture of confusion, brow all creased up and nostrils flared. "You want me to be some kind of police officer?"

"We're calling them peacekeepers," the Major said. "You'll be helping him to keep order in this godforsaken town. I take it you heard about the dead woman they found in the woods last night?"

“Dead woman?” Truth was, I hadn’t really spoken with anyone since this morning’s wake-up call, except for the perky prick who told me to shift my arse over here. The Major nodded, a grim expression settling on his face.

“Granddaughter of the old coot who was murdered yesterday morning. Two killings in one day is a pretty certain sign that we’re losing control here. I need you to help King and Shaw to get their act together, make sure the locals know who’s in charge.”

“Alright, but why me?” I asked. The Major ran his tongue over his top teeth and sighed.

“I like King and Shaw,” he said, leaning back in his chair again. “They’re smart and they’re loyal to a fault. But they don’t have what you have. Raw aggression and a don’t-give-a-shit attitude.”

“I’m flattered.” To be honest, I was more shocked than anything. Was the old bastard actually singing my praises, in a slightly out-of-tune way?

“Go speak with King,” the Major told me. “He already knows he’s getting someone new. Try and get along and make sure this murder business goes away fast. Tensions are already sky high and I don’t want a bloody riot on my hands.”

I rose without another word and strode from the office, still trying to work out how I felt about this new assignment. On one hand, anything was better than standing around playing pocket ping pong with my balls all day. But I had a feeling King and I wouldn’t exactly get along. Admittedly I’d never spoken more than a few words to him, but he always came off as a mummy’s boy who’d somehow stumbled into the war by accident, then by sheer luck got himself promoted to Captain. Who knows, maybe he was just an expert arse licker behind closed doors.

The office was deserted when I showed up, so I ended up wandering towards the barracks, asking every twat in a uniform if they’d seen King or Shaw. Finally I lucked out. Some fishy little pleb had seen them heading into the cell block just after the wake-up call. I wandered back and sure enough they were stood outside this time, puffing on cigarettes and looking more serious than a nun on Sunday.

“King,” I said, although I should’ve really been calling him ‘sir’ as the bastard outranked me. He glanced up at me and looked for a moment like he’d just shat his pants.

“Wightman,” he replied, twisting away to hack up some phlegm. When he turned back again, I noticed how fucking awful he looked. His eyes were bloodshot, more red than white, and he hadn’t even bothered to shave. He looked even worse than Shaw, who was probably one of the biggest souses in the whole fucking squad. “What do you want?”

“I’m all yours,” I told him. “Major reassigned me. I’m replacing that schoolboy who went and got his head blown off.” Both of their faces were a fucking picture and a half when the news sunk in. King’s mouth just kind of dangled open and Shaw’s eyes scrunched up tight, like I’d just gut-punched the twat.

“You serious?” Shaw said with a smile. “We’re supposed to be stopping the homicidal maniacs, not recruiting them.”

“Fuck you, alright?” I stepped closer to the prick and bumped chests with him. “Why don’t you go slump in some corner and drink your wine, leave the real work to real men?”

“Oh for god’s sakes,” King spluttered, “stop it already. We’re not in a bloody playground.” He turned to me, flicking the stub of his fag away. “If you’ve got your orders, then fine. But I need you to do what I say, no rogue shit.”

“Rogue shit?” I couldn’t help but smile. “I don’t go rogue, I just get things done, quickly and cleanly.”

“Cleanly?” Shaw said, shaking that melon head of his. “So when you blew up the bunker down in Lienz, that was clean?”

“Killed ten German officers in one afternoon,” I replied, cracking my knuckles. “More than you managed the entire fucking war.”

“You also destroyed any plans, charts or other useful intel we could have gathered. But then, intelligence was never your strong suit, was it?”

“Won’t be yours either,” I hissed, “when I rip your fucking head off and punt it clean across-”

“Hey!” King got between us, shoving us away before I did something I’d probably never regret. I’ll give this to him, he has more strength than you’d expect from some weedy little puff pastry. “That’s the end of it, alright? Shaw, just shut your bloody mouth.” He turned to me and jabbed a finger into my chest. “We’ll have you, Wightman, but cut out this macho bollocks. We’re on a knife’s edge right now and I don’t need this shite making it worse.”

“No problem,” I said, raising my hands and scowling back. “So come on then, tell me about this murder so we can get on with it.”

He filled me in with all the grisly details and I’ve got to admit, I was intrigued. Old man cops it in his house, skull smashed in with a hammer, then just a few hours later his granddaughter’s found bare-arse naked in the woods with her throat crushed. Some tragic shit. But my interest was really grabbed when he told me about Turner’s little lucky charm being found at the scene of the crime.

“Fuck my arse,” I said with a smile. “You reckon Turner did her in?”

“I don’t know,” King replied. “We’ve got him in a cell. He was completely out of it last night, almost drowned himself in the bloody lake. He’s still sleeping it off. When he wakes up, we’ll see what he says. In the meantime, we need to ask around, find out where this girl lived, who she was living with and when and where she was seen last.” I shook my head.

“Alright, but good luck getting any of these krauts to open up. Most of ‘em would ignore you if you told ‘em their fucking house was on fire. And if they find out it’s a soldier what done that girl in, we’ll be lucky if they don’t come at us all with fucking pitchforks.”

“Found you,” came a voice from behind and when I turned around I saw that crazy doctor storming towards us, firing a seriously fucked-off look our way. I didn’t mind the doc, but he had to be the angriest man that was ever born. I’d bet he even curses in his sleep, the miserable prick. Thankfully he ignored me, aiming his withering glare at King and Shaw instead. “I’ve come by twice already today. What’s the point of having a fucking office if you’re never fucking there?”

“Did you find anything?” King asked, ignoring the outburst. The doc glanced at me with an eyebrow raised.

“Am I okay to discuss it in front of him?”

“Aye, he’s just joined the team.” That seemed to stun the specy little bastard. He gave me the up-and-down like I was a gorilla in uniform, then he shook his head and turned back to King.

“Okay, then. I examined her from head to toe and spotted two things. First, I found traces of semen in the vaginal canal. If I had to guess, I’d say she had sex immediately before she was killed.”

“Jesus, doc,” I said with a grin. “You probed around in that poor dead girl’s wet spot? You scabby old pervert.”

“Watch your fucking mouth,” the doc hissed, finally shooting that devilish glare my way. “I’ll rip your goddamn kidneys out, you bloody meat head.” I raised my hands and swallowed back the sarcastic reply that hovered on my tongue.

“Fair play. Just a joke, doc.” He grimaced at me a while longer, then he shrank down and turned his back on me.

“Ask around,” he told King, “see if she was going with anyone. That’s your best bet.”

“Will do,” King said. “What’s the second thing?”

“Second thing, it looks like someone slashed her hair with a knife. There’s a bit at the side that’s frayed. Looks like about ten centimetres is missing.”

“Strange,” King said, pouting and scratching his cheek. “If her murderer had a knife, why was she strangled?”

“No idea,” the doc replied. “I just tell you what I see, you’re the one who’s supposed to piece all this crap together.” King smirked at that.

“Alright, thanks then doc.”

“Not a problem.” The doc glanced around and then leaned in. “Got something else for you too,” he whispered, just loud enough for me to

catch. King nodded back.

“Okay. Shaw, Wightman, you start with the locals, see if anyone knows anything. I’ll try and wake Turner and get some sense out of him.” With that, King and the doc headed into the cell block. I was half tempted to follow, to see what this mysterious extra thing was, but Shaw fixed his evil eye on me and crossed his arms and I knew the prick wouldn’t shift until I was gone. So I flashed him a wink and a smile and fucked off in search of some info.

## **Seven (Adam)**

He dropped the tiny plastic bottle into my palm and I almost shook with relief. The sound of those little capsules bouncing around inside was the most glorious thing I’d ever heard. My body was deep into the cravings but I quickly fumbled the pills into my jacket pocket so I didn’t appear too desperate, then I smiled at the doc.

“Appreciated.”

“You know I’m running out,” he said, that worried little frown settled on his lips. “I’ve got maybe a month’s supply at best and I don’t know if I can get any more.”

“It’s alright,” I assured him. “It’s just been a crazy bloody time lately. Once we get this murder solved and things quieten down, I’ll try and cut back my dosage.”

“Mmm.” He glanced back over his shoulder, then leaned in. “You’re not lying to me, are you King? You really did lose those pills in the lake, pulling that deranged bastard out?”

“Doc, I swear, that’s what happened.” He left it at that, with a nod and a pat of my shoulder, before turning his attention towards the nearest cell.

“Speaking of which,” he said, strolling up to the bars. “Has he stirred at all yet?”

“He was awake for a few minutes earlier.” I leaned against the wall and peered in at the poor wretch, still curled up in the corner where we’d dumped him, like a knackered old dog. “At least, I think he was. Kept mumbling and kicking out with his feet. I couldn’t make any sense of the shite coming out of his mouth.”

“Want me to take a look at him?” the doc asked. I shrugged.

“You think it’s a good idea?”

“Well, if he’d just been ploughed out of his mind on booze last night, he’d at least be in a coherent state by now, albeit suffering from a hangover worse than death.” The doc banged on the bars a few times but Turner didn’t even stir. “This looks like something else entirely. Maybe he got his hands on something even I don’t stock.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“Well, I’ve heard that some sedatives can make you go a little loopy if you mix them with booze.” He turned to me with a glimmer of a smile. “That’s the problem with all of this new shit doing the rounds. It’s unpredictable. Best to stick with what we know.”

“Alright, well, if you think it might be serious,” I said, fishing out the key for the cell. I unlocked the door and heaved it aside so the doc could get in, then I followed and stood at the other side of the cell, giving him room to work. The doc started by rolling Turner onto his back, not an easy feat as the bugger was all tense and stiff like a corpse. Corpse was a good comparison as Turner was dead to the world still, not even stirring as he was man-handled into position. Finally, when he was spread out across the stone floor, the doc knelt by his shoulder and slipped two fingers beneath Turner’s jaw, poking the tips into his throat. He paused like that for a moment, his brow creased.

“Pulse is a little high but nothing serious.” The doc hunched over and pulled back Turner’s right eyelid. A bright blue eyeball peered back. “He really is out of it,” the doc said, almost sounding impressed. He turned to

me with a grin. “Whatever filth he ingested last night, I could use some of it mys-”

I can’t remember exactly how it happened, but I think I saw that eyeball swivel and focus on the doc just a half second before those meaty hands came up and wrapped around his neck. Suddenly Turner’s screams filled the cell, his face a picture of pure horror. He looked like some demented apparition, spittle flying from his lips as he screeched and pushed his fingers into the doc’s throat.

“Jesus bloody Christ,” I yelled, pushing away from the wall and throwing myself at Turner. I grabbed a wrist with one hand and pushed my other into his face, trying to separate him from the poor bastard he was throttling, but I was in such a rush that my palm slipped and the next thing I knew, his teeth were sinking into my flesh. The crazy fucker bit down hard, crunching the bones just beneath my fingers. God, the pain was horrific, shooting right up my arm and making me howl like a bloody wolf. I let go of his wrist and did the only thing I could. I jabbed my thumb into his gaping eyeball, pushing down until his jaw finally released me and he fell away.

In a mad panic I stumbled backwards, slamming down hard to the ground. For a second all I could do was stare aghast at my hand, blood seeping from the tiny tooth holes and trickling down onto the dusty floor. Finally the adrenalin kicked in and I shook myself out of the stupor, gritting my teeth and pushing back up to my feet. Turner had at least let go of the doc, but he was still thrashing around and yelling at the top of his lungs. Meanwhile the doc was sucking in great gasps of air and trying desperately to scramble away on his arse, eventually battling his way back out of the cell through the open door. I let him go, then I slammed the door shut again and turned to the crazy bastard kicking out and buckling against the filthy stone, his hands pressed over his face. If I were deeply religious, I’d have sworn that the man was possessed by some kind of demon, trying furiously to escape its fleshy cage. The noise coming out of him was inhuman, halfway between a screech and a snarl.

“Turner!” I yelled, dodging to the side as his foot lashed out at me. “Snap out of it! Can you hear me, eh? Calm the fuck down!”



“Fucking hell,” the doc grunted, staggering up with one hand clutched to his throat. His voice was hoarse and his face was drenched with sweat. “He’s having some kind of fit, get out of there!”

“How do we stop it?” I asked, backing into the corner of the cell. The doc shook his head.

“I don’t fucking know, I don’t even know what the crazy prick’s taken! Maybe your pills might help calm him, but I’ve got no fucking clue how you’ll get him to swallow one!”

“Jesus Christ.” I fondled the pill bottle in my pocket and stared down at Turner’s muscular frame, jerking and twitching all over the place. There was no way I was going anywhere near his mouth again; my hand still burned like hell, my skin hot and sticky. But I needed him to stop before he snapped his own bloody neck. “Fine. Fuck it.” I pulled out the bottle and flipped the lid with my thumb, fishing out one of the magic pills. I almost fumbled and dropped the damn thing because my fingers were damp with sweat and blood, but somehow I caught the pill in the air and clasped it tight in my palm. My heart was pumping so hard that my entire body was trembling, but I didn’t have any time left. Resisting the urge to swallow back the tablet myself, I stepped towards Turner and braced myself.

“Turner,” I said, side-stepping another kick. “Turner, I need you to take this bloody thing, okay? You’ll be fine after, you just need to take this pill.” If he heard me and understood, he showed no signs of it. If anything, his throes were twice as violent, his skull smashing back against the cold stone. It was now or never. I held my breath and dropped on top of him, pulling one of his hands away and crushing my arm down across his throat. Turner jerked and tried to throw me off, but I held on tight and planted a foot against the bars, gaining leverage. My free hand came up and forced the pill into his gaping mouth, just as he snatched at my hair and yanked my head backwards, exposing my throat. I figured he was ready to tear my windpipe out with his teeth, so I rolled sideways and pulled free of his grasp, then I grabbed him again and forced his jaw shut with both hands, hoping to god that he’d swallowed the bloody tablet.

For a few seconds he kept on thrashing, but then his strength seemed to fade and the fight just left his body, leaving him withered and panting. His eyes fell still, the one I’d jabbed all red and bloody. If it wasn’t for his chest

heaving up and down, I'd have thought for sure that the poor bastard was dead.

"Bloody hell," I muttered, collapsing back against the bars and hacking until my throat ached.

"You okay?" the doc asked, leaning in above me. I shook my head.

"Need...a fag," I gasped. He smiled and pulled out a pack, dropping one of the cigarettes into my lap.

"The least you deserve, you mad fucking prick. You're lucky he didn't chew your fingers off."

I'd just lifted the fag to my lips when Turner made a strange grunting noise, then some kind of garbled sentence came spilling out. I scooted over and stopped at his side, cautiously leaning in. Sure enough, he was just muttering gibberish. Most of what came out of his mouth wasn't even real words. I sighed and climbed back to my feet, then shuffled to the door and let myself out.

"Best leave him, you reckon?" I asked the doc. He nodded, staring grimly through the bars.

"Not much else we can do."

The doc let himself out and I grabbed the one chair in the place and slid it across to the cell, then collapsed down and fished out my lighter, finally sparking up the fag that was dangling from my lips. That first long drag of smoke was heaven. I let it sit in my lungs for a moment before slowly pushing it back out through my nostrils. It was good, but as soon as the doc buggered off I popped one of my pills as well. After that little scare, I needed some serious balancing out.

Despite the pill, I was still shaking when I arrived at the address I had for Lorient, located close to the central square. The house, when I found it, was a tiny, squat little terrace crushed into a narrow pedestrian strip, not much more than an alleyway, just off the high street. I noted the stench that hit me as soon as I turned into the alley, like rotting fish. My nose wrinkled and I tried to take only shallow breaths as I found the door and unlocked it with the key we'd found in Lorient's jacket.

Her house had been inherited from her parents, who had both passed away the year before, although how all three of them had lived in here I had no idea. Inside was more cramped than I'd imagined, even from the crushed-up exterior. The place wasn't much more than a couple of rooms connected by a staircase, the ground floor used as a kitchen and the upstairs as a bedroom, with a tiny washroom attached. I figured that no one had come by since the murder, as LORIETT's things were still scattered around the place. A used plate and mug were sat on the table, with remnants of her final meal still encrusted on them. Upstairs, some old clothes had been shoved to one corner of the bedroom, while some others were lying on the bed, as if she'd struggled to choose what to wear before leaving the house for the last time. Aside from these scattered things, LORIETT didn't seem to own too much beyond a few dresses and pairs of shoes.

For a while I stared at the clothes scattered across the bed. LORIETT had been living alone, that much was clear, and as far as we could tell she had no other family or friends. No one had come to see the body, not a single person. It seemed almost unbelievable that a young, beautiful girl could apparently be so isolated in a town like this, but perhaps she was the loner type. More happy alone with her own thoughts than in the company of others. I wondered what would happen to this place now that she was gone. If anyone would come to collect her things, or if they'd just be heaped into a couple of bags and taken away. The few traces of her removed, as if she never even existed.

I had a look around but turned up nothing at all, another dead end, and when I left it was with a deep-rooted frustration. It was already growing dark outside by the time I got back to the cells and took my seat by TURNER's cell, but the others still hadn't returned. SHAW was eventually the next one back, once again with little good news to speak of. LORIETT's grandfather had been the last surviving relative of hers. No siblings to speak of and no husband or lover either, or at least none that the townsfolk were willing to divulge. That certainly seemed to match up with what I saw at her house.

"Took me ages just to find out that much," SHAW said with a sigh, unscrewing a bottle of whiskey. He sank a finger and held it out, but I turned him down with a shake of the head. I wanted to be completely sober when TURNER finally snapped back to reality, if that moment ever came. "Looks like word might be spreading out there," he continued, taking

another pull on the whiskey. “How a soldier did the girl in. I had to practically get on my knees and beg like a dog just to get anyone to even look my way. Most of ‘em turned heel and buggered off the second they saw me approach.”

“How does this shite get out?” I muttered, stretching on the battered old metal chair. “Anyway, we don’t know for sure it was Turner. That lucky charm of his could’ve just fallen out of his car or something. It was just lying at the side of the road, not clutched in the dead girl’s hand or anything.”

“Lying in the road at the exact point where she’d been dumped,” Shaw said, cradling the bottle in his arms. A twisted smile broke across his face. “If it really did just tumble out there, that’s one hell of a lucky charm. Could get the poor bugger shot.”

“Well, hopefully he’ll wake up some time soon so we can find out what the hell happened. He’s been out of it for nearly twenty hours now.”

“He’ll be feeling rough as hell when he does wake up,” Shaw said. “Think I’ll leave the questioning to you, chum.” I rolled my eyes.

“You’re a true asset, Shaw. Now I remember why I picked you.”

“You picked me?” Shaw said with a frown. I bit my cheek and tried to keep from cursing. “You mean, you chose me to do this? To be a peacekeeper or whatever the hell they call it?”

“I might have put your name forward,” I said with a shrug. “I thought this might be more fun than cleaning out toilets or picking through rubble or doing pointless drills all day long.”

“Oh, I know why you picked me.” Shaw leaned towards me, setting the bottle between his feet. “You picked me because I tossed back that grenade that almost took your face off.” I stared back, swallowing down the acid that tried to leap up into my mouth. Every time I thought of that day, I felt like my entire body was going to implode. That was the day where the whole mortality thing really kicked in and I truly saw what was waiting for us all on the other side. Just one bad decision away.

“I guess I had a feeling that things would get tense,” I told him, reaching down and grabbing the whiskey. I took a single sip, just to taste, then slid the bottle back between his feet. “I just wanted people that I could trust with my life.”

“So what about Wightman?” Shaw asked, glancing cautiously over his shoulder as if merely saying the Second Lieutenant’s name would somehow summon him into the room, like a demon. “You trust him?”

“I don’t know yet,” I said, the honest truth. Shaw’s lips pulled tight.

“He’s a total maniac who gets his kicks from killing.”

“I don’t know, maybe. When I saw him out there, after we took the town, I got the feeling...I don’t think he enjoys it. I think he’s just bloody good at it.”

“Believe me, that meathead, he’s one of those fellas who lives off of violence. I’ve seen him punch out at least two other Lieutenants since the occupation. He should’ve been court martialled months ago for disobeying orders and now that bloody bugger of a Major slaps him down on our doorstep? What is this, punishment for what happened to Lane?”

I was about to answer when a noise from the cell stole my attention. Turner was groaning, his hands pressed up to his face again. Immediately I leapt up and grabbed the bars, peering down at him.

“Turner! Hey, Turner! Can you hear me?”

“Nggghhhhhh,” Turner said, rolling onto his side. I squeezed the bars tight, then I cursed and snatched up the key and unlocked the cell door. Carefully I stepped inside, moving around behind him and pausing there for a moment.

“Turner, are you awake? Do you know where you are?” The groaning stopped and his hands fell away and he twisted his head towards me, staring up with a pained expression. He seemed to struggle to focus, his eyes pinching. “Turner, do you understand me?”

“Yes,” he said, his voice crackling as if he were an eighty-year-old man with a bad chest. I slumped a little, releasing a long, drawn-out breath.

“Do you remember what happened?”

“Where the hell am I?” Turner planted a palm against the wall and strained to pick himself up off the floor, but he only managed about three inches. I squatted next to him and tucked my hand under his armpit, helping him to sit up. When he glanced around, I saw the fear take hold. “Oh, bloody fuck. What did I do?”

“That’s what I need to find out,” I told him. “What do you remember from last night?”

“Shit. Not much.” He pushed a fist against his forehead and grimaced. “God, it feels like there’s a hundred ants crawling around in there. Jesus, is my nose broken? It feels like it’s broken.”

“Okay,” I sighed. “Let’s start with what you do remember. You took one of the cars and drove out of town in the afternoon.”

“Right, yeah. The Major wanted some supplies, so I went to Kungsbrucken to stock up.” He smacked his lips and coughed. “Could I get some water?”

“Course, hang on.” I decided to lock the cell while I fetched some water from the outside tap. Turner didn’t look in any state to run and he’d probably get no further than the town square if he did somehow get past us both, but I didn’t want to take any chances. When I returned, he was still sat on the ground, staring into space. He knocked back the water in one gulp and thanked me.

“I decided to have a quick drink in one of the old bars there,” he continued. “Before heading back. But I guess I ended up staying a while longer than expected. I met this local girl, really stunning. She came and sat beside me and we got talking. She said she always wanted to make love with a British soldier.” He smiled, scratching his cheek and staring sheepishly down at his boots. “Who could possibly refuse that kind of offer, right?”

“So you went back to hers?”

“Yeah, we drank some more, we fooled around. That’s the last thing I really remember before waking up in this place.” He shivered and rubbed

his own shoulders. “So what happened? Tell me I didn’t do anything too stupid.”

“You were in a bit of a state, aye.” Right then I didn’t have the heart to tell him that he nearly ran me over before trying to drown himself, but I figured he’d hear all about it soon enough. For now, I decided to focus on filling in the blanks. “You looked like you might have taken something a bit stronger than booze,” I said. Turner glanced at his hands, which were trembling slightly.

“It’s possible, I suppose. My mind is just...it’s all just blank. Maybe the girl slipped something into my drink, I don’t know.”

“Okay, so tell me about the girl. You remember where she lived, what her name was?” Turner frowned and shook his head.

“I really don’t. She was quite tall, long black hair, pretty. I wasn’t really paying any attention when we drove back to hers. I was just concentrating on not slamming the car into any walls.”

“And you don’t remember driving home after leaving her place?”

“No...” His eyes glazed over and I had to stop myself from reaching out and shaking him hard. Instead, I bit my tongue and tried some gentle prodding to see if I could get him on track.

“So you don’t remember driving up to the lake and jumping straight in?” I asked. His brow furrowed and he stared back silently.

“Shit,” he finally whispered. “I was really out of it.” I let out a sigh.

“This is going to be harder than I thought,” I said as I dropped onto my arse and crossed my legs, trying to work out if he was lying through his teeth. If this memory loss really was bollocks, the guy deserved to be in the movies. He looked genuinely concerned and rightly so. But the worst was still to come. “There’s something else,” I said and the wrinkles of concern deepened.

“What now? Did I try and throw myself off a cliff too?”

“We found a body last night,” I said, suddenly craving another fag. My hand even moved subconsciously to my pocket, my fingertips fumbling at

the air inside before I remembered losing every last one to Shaw the night before. “A girl, out in the woods at the edge of town.”

“Bloody hell. I didn’t run her down, did I? I really can’t remember driving back.”

“We’re looking into it, but there’s something you should know.” I fished in another pocket and brought out the golden eagle. The thing was smooth and cold against my palm and I held it out to him, keeping a close watch for his reaction. At first he seemed confused, until he reached into his own jacket and fumbled around. Then realisation dawned.

“That’s my lucky eagle,” he said, cautiously reaching out and taking the thing. He stared down at it, probably wondering if he really wanted to ask the obvious question. Finally he cleared his throat and came out with it. “Where did you find it?”

“Side of the road, halfway through the woods.” I was tense as hell, but there was no avoiding it. I had to tell him. “It was lying about fifty feet away from the dead girl’s body.” Now I could see the fear in his eyes, real for sure. No way to fake that. The same fear a man has when he knows he’s dying and there’s nothing he can do to change it.

“Fuck.” He shook his head, clenching his fist around the eagle. “I can’t have done it, no. How could I do something like that and not even remember it?” He dropped his face into his hands, the eagle clattering across the stone floor and coming to rest by his foot. I didn’t know what to say to him. I didn’t understand it either, but I was there when he slammed his car into that rock, when he staggered out crazed and tried to attack his comrades, before throwing himself into that ice cold water. For that moment he’d been reduced to an animal, wild and frenzied.

For a while we just sat there, Turner rocking back and forth and me watching him silently. Then he just stopped. Slowly his head came up and I swear the colour had dropped right out of his face. This spectre of a man looked at me and said:

“Oh, fuck. I remember her.”

“What?” I leaned closer, heart pounding. “What do you remember?”



“She had curly hair, golden yellow. And she was wearing a red coat.” His eyes welled up and he started to tremble. “Fucking hell, she was dead. I was standing there, looking into her eyes and she was fucking dead. Oh god, did I do it? Did I really kill her?”

“What did you do to her?” I asked, my voice rising. “Turner, look at me! What did you do to her?” He seemed to be staring right through me, his mouth dangling open.

“I don’t know,” he finally muttered. “I think I grabbed her. I don’t know, I don’t fucking know!” Suddenly he launched himself against the wall and kicked his way up to his feet, smashing his fist against the bricks and screaming at the top of his lungs. I jerked away from him, stumbling back up and pushing into the far corner. “Fuck,” he yelled, lashing out at the wall over and over. By the fifth punch, his knuckles had left a bloody smear across the surface. I cursed and lunged at him, grabbing his shoulders to pull him back, but he twisted out of my grasp and knocked me away with his elbow. When he stared at me, I recognised the look in his eyes. It was the look of a wild, cornered animal, the same horrified expression he wore the night before as he lunged at me from the car. For a second I thought he was about to pounce, but he just stood there, panting and shaking his head.

“Turner-” I started, but he cut me off.

“What if I did it? What if I killed her?” He stared down at his hands and whimpered and that was the moment I thought it was all over. I released a long, exhausted breath and took three steps to the door, swinging it open and locking it behind me. Inside, Turner took one look at me and then slumped back into his corner, burying his head between his legs.

“I’m sorry,” I told him, then I turned and walked away.

## **Eight (Emily)**

The noise coming from next door was different tonight. At first it sounded like an argument, the two of them bickering loudly. I couldn't remember ever hearing the Klingmanns raise their voices in the five or so years that they'd lived on the other side of that paper-thin wall, so my curiosity was immediately raised. I thought I heard the back door shut, so I figured that one of them had stormed outside to escape the other, perhaps have a cigarette to calm down, but the argument kept on going, as fierce as ever. At that point I started humming and deliberately banging the pots as I washed them up, hoping that they'd get the hint and keep the noise down a little. A minute later, I put aside the last of the washing up and held my breath. The argument had finished but I thought I heard one of them, probably Hetti, crying. Curiosity got the better of me and I pressed my ear against the wall, hoping to catch some little part of the drama, but by then everything had gone strangely quiet again.

"Crazy people," I muttered, sitting back at the kitchen table and returning to the book I was halfway through. Father was already asleep upstairs and I didn't feel like taking a bath, not after the previous night, so I spent the quiet hours reading some old novel about life in renaissance times. The romance of it all, the very idea of freedom of expression, had me daydreaming like a little girl. It wasn't until I felt a sudden heat against my face and heard a strange background rustling noise that I tore myself away, realising something was badly wrong.

I was halfway up the staircase when I noticed black smoke drifting across the ceiling above. My belly clenched and I tore up the remaining stairs, my legs trembling the whole way up. When I got to the top and twisted around, I saw that the smoke was pouring out of my bedroom, gushing into the hallway in all directions. I could hear a terrifying crackling sound coming from within and through the crack of the open door I saw that the wall glowed orange, the light flickering and dancing.

"No," I breathed, dipping my head and crushing my palm over my mouth to try and keep out the smoke. I hurried across and nudged the door open and a barrier of heat slammed into me, knocking me backwards and burning my cheeks. My hand fell away as I grabbed the bannisters and a finger of acrid smoke slipped to the back of my throat, making me retch and choke. Everything blurred. I bent over and hacked until my chest ached, staggering down the hallway towards my father's room. "Papa," I tried to yell, but it

came out as a desperate whisper, dying on my tongue and my throat burned at the effort, as if I'd swallowed back a fistful of razorblades. The strangest thing was how tired I suddenly felt. I could just lay down right where I stood and close my eyes and drift away. I had to shake my head and slap my face to keep my eyelids from drooping.

When I reached my father's room, I shouldered the door open and staggered inside, my heart leaping when I saw that the wall just six feet from his bed had caught on fire. Angry flames licked their way up the wallpaper, causing it to blacken and peel away in great chunks. Already the smoke had covered the ceiling and it was creeping down, filling the room with a dull haze. My father was tossing and turning in his bed, moaning loudly. I held my breath and staggered across, yanking back his sheets and grabbing his shoulders and shaking him as hard as my throbbing muscles could manage. At first he only moaned louder, but then his eyes edged open and he stared up at me, confused and frightened.

"What, what is it?" he asked. When he turned and saw the fire spreading across the wall, he snapped out of his stupor immediately. His face twisted in panic and he reached out and wrapped his fingers around my arm. "Lord have mercy, the house is burning!"

"I know that," I wheezed back, trying to get a grip on him and lift him out of bed. He wrapped an arm around my neck and slowly I managed to drag him to the edge of the bed, where he dropped his legs over the side and planted his heels on the floor. By now I was sucking in the smoke with every breath and the stuff was getting in my eyes, stinging them like a dozen tiny needles pushing on the surface. Tears streamed down my cheeks, blurring my vision. I gasped and pushed away from the bed, heaving my father upwards until he was stood beside me, our arms wrapped tight around each other. Then we started towards the door, fighting against the burning heat.

When we struggled our way into the hall, my hopes collapsed. The air was thick with rolling soot, so dense that I couldn't even see the way through. I swallowed hard and turned to father.

"Just keep on walking, papa. Hold on tight and keep on walking." He nodded, coughing into his fist. Then, not wasting another second, I

squeezed his arm and pushed into the cloud. Immediately I had to close my eyes, shielding them from the pungent smoke. The pair of us staggered forwards into the thick of it and I followed the bannisters, sliding one hand along them until I felt that we'd reached the top of the staircase. My chest was already burning but I kept my lips clamped shut, slowly releasing my breath through my nostrils.

I was about to stretch out my foot and feel for the edge of the stairs when I felt father shudder and then fall limp beside me and the sudden weight knocked me off balance. My fingernails scraped down the wall as we collapsed together to the ground and the impact knocked the breath from me, making me suck up more of the filthy air. Gasping and choking, I desperately scrambled to pick myself up. I could barely even tell which way was up any longer, my senses dull. Blinded, I groped my way to the wall and then reached out and found papa, lying still and silent just beside me. I tried to get my hands beneath him to lift him up, but I didn't have the strength. My entire body was shaking and my chest was on fire and I felt my limbs growing numb, so I did the only thing I could. I grabbed him by the arm and used the last of my strength to drag him across the carpet, towards the staircase. By now I wasn't even thinking. Instincts had taken over and all I knew was that I had to get us both out of there, or we'd be dead for certain. Inch by painful inch I pulled him to the stairs, finally forcing him up to the edge. With one last frantic heave, we both went over.

Everything became a wretched, painful blur. All I can remember are snippets of the next few minutes, half-slipping, half-crawling down the staircase. We were out of the smoke now, but the air was still hot and heavy and toxic. I tried to take in too much at once and retched violently, the force of it burning my throat even more. Still I kept on going, my left hand curled around my father's arm. He was unconscious, tumbling down like a rag doll beside me, but I couldn't leave him alone in here. I had to get us both out.

Somehow we made it to the bottom of the stairs and I immediately tried to rise to my feet, but a sickening dizziness overcame me and I collapsed sideways into the enormous ornate mirror hanging beside the front door. The thing came crashing down and I followed it, landing hard on the broken shards of glass. Their razor edges sliced into my flesh but I barely even felt it over everything else. My gaze dropped and I saw thin rivulets of blood trickling from the cuts on my palms and I paused, suddenly wondering if

any of this was real. Surely just a terrible dream...even the pain was slipping away now...

No, no, I couldn't do this. I had to get him outside. I crushed my teeth together and rolled off the broken mirror, then I grabbed the coat stand with trembling arms and slowly dragged myself upwards. Smoke swirled above me hypnotically but I looked away, hacking again to clear my lungs of soot. The pain in my hands and wrists flared up and I felt the tiny shards of glass pushing deeper into my flesh, but I kept on going, kept pulling until I was finally back on my feet.

I reached out to the door and jerked it open and the smoke immediately gushed out and the cool night air swept in, washing over my face. After sucking in a glorious breath, I clamped my hand over my face and staggered back to my father, still motionless at the bottom of the staircase. Quickly I hunched over and tried to grab a hold of him to drag him outside, but my fingers were suddenly useless, refusing to grip. The pain was gone but my arms felt like sticks of lead and just as I was about to cry out in frustration, my legs betrayed me too, folding up beneath me. My strength all used up, I collapsed over father. Darkness came, too insistent this time to blink away. I whispered to him that he had nothing to worry about, then I drifted away.

## **Nine (Katherine)**

I stood by the window and watched the spooky orange glow which lit up the sky, just beyond the trees. I'd seen this before, one other time. The clouds had glimmered like that when the English soldiers first came, when the town had burned all night long. That time the glow was so bright that it almost felt like daytime. I remembered standing up on the cliffs and seeing clear across town, from one end to the other, at some time just after midnight.

“Something bad’s happening,” I whispered to Katz, who was curled up by my feet. He didn’t budge, lazy dog. Probably dreaming about squirrels. I left him to it and went down to the basement, taking the torch that Captain King let me keep as a prize. It was much better than the candle, really powerful. I followed its white hot beam to my treasure chest and knelt in front of it, pushing back the lid. The gun was sat on top of the pile and I carefully lifted it out with both hands. I still hadn’t built up the courage to try it out, but I felt better just knowing that it was here if I needed it.

Tonight, I took the gun upstairs and slept with it on the windowsill beside me.

## **Ten (Terry)**

I’ll give this to the krauts. They know how to throw a fucking good bonfire.

When word spread about the show, most of the squad came stumbling down with their whiskey and wine to gawp at the spectacle. King, being his usual superhero suck-up self, decided to pitch in with the utterly helpless firefighting operation. Got to admit, their efforts weren’t completely pointless. The mere sight of two dozen idiots running around like their arses were burning, desperately trying to put out a raging fifty-foot fire with a bunch of flimsy hoses, was probably the funniest thing I’ve seen since I signed up. A striking victory for morale.

In well under half an hour, about seven or eight houses in a row had burned into cinders. The cretins managed to actually get their act together and work as a team and they didn’t give up until the flames finally died down. Then everyone, soldiers and locals alike, stood around staring at the remains and shuffling their feet awkwardly. I was just glad that Mick was laid up in the infirmary. If he’d seen what had happened, he’d have flipped out big time.

For a while I sat there, inhaling those gorgeous smoky vapours and the bitter tang of burned wood, until King and Shaw came across to spoil my

mood. Shaw was wearing his usual cross-eyed scowl and King looked as put-out as ever. I smiled up at them as they hovered over me.

“Greetings, chaps,” I said and immediately Shaw piped up.

“Didn’t feel like helping out?” He fixed his grim look on me and I shrugged.

“Looked like you had it all under control,” I replied. “Anyway, thought I’d been signed up for police work, not fireman duties.” Shaw snorted.

“It’s called being a human, shit head.” He started to do the whole finger-wagging thing, but King cut him off.

“I’m going to help the doc get the wounded back to infirmary,” King said and he nodded at me. “I need you to question everyone in the area, see if you can find out what started the fire. Alright?”

“I guess so.” I sighed and eased myself up, straightening my jacket and brushing the dirt from my trousers. “Better crack on, then.”

“Pair up with Shaw,” King said and both me and the souse shot him a filthy look. “Is there a problem?” he fired back and I had to bite my bloody tongue.

“Course not,” I said, “sounds like a wonderful idea.” I glared at Shaw, then started towards the gathered crowd without waiting for him.

You wouldn’t have to be a psychic to predict how useful the locals were with our inquiries. If they actually bothered to reply, it was either with one-word answers, or usually just grunts. Most of them just shook their heads and fucked off. Still, it didn’t really bother me too much, partly because I’d expected it and partly because the cold front was really getting on Shaw’s tits. After the twentieth brush-off, he even started muttering under his breath. I had to clench my jaw to keep from breaking out in a massive grin.

“Looks like we’re stuck in the town of the blind,” I said to him with a cheery tone as we walked through the masses, searching for someone who hadn’t ignored us already. “No one ever sees a thing.”

“Thankless task,” Shaw grunted back, letting out a bitter sigh. He stopped on the spot and shook his head. “The hell with it, let’s go to the

infirmary, speak with some of the wounded. Maybe they'll be a bit more open to helping out."

We could've walked to the infirmary in about ten minutes, but there were plenty of waiting trucks so we hopped a ride and made it there in less than two. If I'd been alone I'd have just walked it, but with the unwanted company I was grateful for the ride. Who knows, the soft prick might've tried to make conversation if we'd sauntered over together, straighten out our difference or some bollocks. When we reached the cold grey building, all of the lights were on and a huddle of five fellas were stood by the entrance, smoking and passing a bottle. I recognised one of them, Moss, a mental bastard from Wigan. He came across as a bit of a toff, but he was only too happy to jump into a ruck. I'd seen him take down three krauts in about ten seconds using just his bayonet. One unlucky fucker even got it right through his balls. Moss was going to just let him bleed out, until this young lad called Jimmy Day saw pity on the twat and put a bullet in his ear. Moss had to do the same to Jimmy about three days later, when the lad got pinned down by a collapsing ceiling. I'd never seen anything like that mess. Jimmy was completely gone, right up to his ribcage. Everything below that was just mush, trapped beneath this enormous slab of concrete, but the poor bastard was somehow still alive and fully conscious. He'd gone numb at least, but he knew what was coming. He kept on crying for his mother and begging us to pull him out, until Moss couldn't take it anymore. I'd have done it myself if he'd left it any longer.

"Alright, Moss," I said as we brushed past and he flashed me a wink.

"Wighty. Heard you got transferred to detective duties. What's the Major's plan, have you take out every last German so there's no one left to police?"

"All too happy to oblige," I replied and he laughed and shook his head. Shaw stopped beside us and I almost expected him to tut and roll his eyes.

"Don't encourage him," he told Moss. "He'd probably do it just for a dare."

"I'd do pretty much anything for a dare," I said, turning to him. "Someone want to dare me to break this fella's face?" There was a murmur of laughter behind me and Shaw fixed his usual glare on me.



“I’ve got a dare for you,” he said with a sniff. “I dare you to go lie down in the middle of the road, until a truck runs over that melon head of yours.” Another rumble of chuckles erupted from the huddle and even I cracked a smile at that one. Fair play to the lad, he had some balls. Of course, I still had a deep desire to rip his sack off and shove it straight down his fucking throat. I would’ve shot right back with a few more choice obscenities, but he turned and bugged off into the infirmary before I even opened my gob, so I just turned and smiled at Moss instead.

“Tetchy little bastard needs his diaper changing. Be right back.”

I caught up with the dour bastard in the corridor, packed out with what I guessed were relatives of the wounded buggers inside. We squeezed through the gathering, catching either hacky or terrified looks from the lot of them. I guessed that the rumours of a soldier offing that girl had spread around the whole town by now. We might’ve been looked at like dog shit these past few weeks, but now we were the biggest flaming heap of dung imaginable. Might as well be wearing swastikas and carting their children off to death camps.

“By the way,” I called out to Shaw as we side-stepped through a gaggle of women, “always meant to ask. How’d you lose those two fingers? Some kind of unfortunate wiping accident?”

“Nope,” he hollered back over the chatter of the crowds. “Happened when I was fooling around with your mum. Her cunt was so cold, I got frostbite. Good thing I tried my fingers first.” Again, the prick got me to grin. Not bad, Shaw. Not bad.

“I thought you’d be the kind of stiff, uppity twat that was above making mother jokes. Guess you’re even sicker than I thought.”

The doc’s workroom was just as packed with sweating, shaking bodies as the hallway. Most of the patients were sat around or slumped against the walls as the doc scarpered between them and he already looked agitated as hell, probably because he actually had to do some fucking work. King was in the far corner, talking with one of the local men who had a bandage slung across one eye. Shaw strode over and I scanned the crowd, looking for Mick. His bed was now occupied by two sickly-looking old men, sat side-by-side on the mattress and taking it in turns to hack up phlegm into

crinkled hankies, between shouting at each other over Christ-knows-what. I wondered if Mick had been discharged early to make some room, but then I spotted him hunched up in a wooden chair just behind the bed. He had his knackered leg up on a crate and a bewildered expression plastered across his face. I wandered over, intent on cheering the poor bastard up.

“How you doing, dearie,” I asked him, pulling up another crate and dropping down onto it. The mug didn’t seem too happy to see me. He was just peering around at all the injured ninnies, his head bobbing like an excited dog’s.

“What’s going on,” he asked, all timid as usual.

“Big old fire, down the west side of town. Same street we were lurking in last night.” The mention of that stretched his eyes even wider. “Don’t worry,” I told him with a grin. “I’m sure your bird’s alright. Heard some couple got burned into bacon and an old fella copped it, but that was it.” I glanced around at the ashen faces. “Shame she’s not in here, you could help nurse her back to health.”

“Jesus,” Mick muttered. “Maybe I should help. See if the doc needs some...assistance or anything.”

I was about to say bollocks to that, rest yourself up mate, when King called my name and gestured me over. So I told Mick to keep his chin up and I sauntered over to that pair of fannies, Shaw giving me the evils as usual.

“We’ve spoken with everyone here,” King told me, stifling a yawn. He looked like absolute shit, like he hadn’t slept in months. “A couple of the locals living opposite say they saw the fire start at number five, near the middle of the block. There was a young couple living there, Friedrich and Hetti Klingmann. They’re both dead.”

“Okay,” I said, crossing my arms. “So what now?”

“Not much else we can do,” King replied. “Looks like a tragic accident, nothing more. Probably just a candle that got knocked over or maybe a stove that was left on.”

“Suits me,” I said with a shrug. “Reckon we could all do with some kip, let’s get out of this hive.”

When we turned to go, Mick was slumped down in his chair, most likely pretending to sleep as the two old coots continued to blast each other. I smiled and left him to it, following King and Shaw out of there.

I hung back a little after we pushed out into the cool breeze, a blessed fucking relief after that stuffy stinkhole, pausing for a few seconds to light up a fag. The smoke rolled into my lungs and made me feel whole again, even if the feeling swiftly rushed away again. When the other two were far enough ahead, I puffed out the smoke and followed at a gentle pace.

We’d only gone about fifty yards when I noticed that King and Shaw had stopped for some reason, their heads turned towards the morgue. I reluctantly trudged up to them and soon realised why they’d paused. From somewhere inside the building, I could hear the strains of a woman screaming at the top of her lungs. Sounded like she was bellowing with rage at some poor twat. The other two had already started over and while normally I’d say fuck it and just head back to the barracks, for some reason my interest was all fired up. Perhaps I just secretly hoped that the crazed bint would let fly at my new colleagues, maybe finishing up with a kick to the crotch or two. That’d put the finishing shine on a not-too-dreary day.

The racket was drifting out through an open window at the side of the morgue. The windows had to be open all day and night, or else the place would’ve smelled rotten as hell and even then the stink of decomposition still lingered, heavy enough to smack you in the face like a sock full of stones every time you wandered in. I filled my lungs with more smoke instead and stepped inside, in time to see King and Shaw push into the room on the far left. The door was propped open with a brick and when I peered in I saw three bodies lined up on the floor, each spread out on a sheet. Two of the corpses were fully chargrilled, their skin burned right onto their bones with a lovely crispy finish. Not so the third, some old geezer who looked more or less in one piece. A young woman was stood beside him, unloading a heap of abuse at two other soldiers as King pushed forwards and tried to interrupt.

For a moment I had this troubled feeling in my gut. I just couldn't stop staring at that girl. Something about her sharp jaw and those eyes, dark as coal, was hauntingly familiar. It took me a while, but finally my stupid, slow brain kicked into life and I realised that I'd seen her just the night before. Only then she'd been dripping wet and wearing nothing but some worn old towel. She turned on King and howled at him, the same way she'd done to me in that garden.

"Why won't anyone listen," she yelled, baring her teeth like a rabid dog. Her face was glowing red and her hair was sticking to her forehead with sweat. King held out his hands and tried to tell her to calm down but he might as well have tossed a petrol can on a fucking bonfire. "Get out of my face, you don't even care! Just wait until it's your home burning down, then you'll care maybe!" I prayed to the baby Jesus that she'd treat him to one of those wicked slaps, but instead she doubled up, clutching her throat. She hacked and coughed until finally she spat up what looked like black phlegm. Some of the stuff trickled down her chin, dripping onto the floor beside the old man's skull.

"God," King said with a grimace. "Are you alright?" Eventually she straightened, dabbing away the spit with the back of her hand. She looked no less hacked off than before.

"The fire was no accident," she growled, her voice crackling. "Someone is responsible." King shot her a confused look and I probably did the same.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Emily. Emily Hanna. I live with my father, next door to the Klingmanns." She pointed a slender finger at the two well-done steaks lying next to what was presumably her dad.

"Alright, so how do you know it wasn't an accident?" King asked. The woman sighed and clasped her hands over her hips.

"It's what I heard, before the fire. It wasn't normal. They were arguing just before it happened, and I thought I heard the front door close, or maybe the back. I think that someone else might have been there."

"Do you know what they were arguing about?"

“I don’t know.” She dropped her head into her hands and scrunched up her hair, crushing her eyes shut. “It sounded bad. I’d never heard them argue before, not like that.” Her arms dropped back to her sides and she glanced up again, and that’s when those pitch black eyes locked on me and flashed with surprise. I braced myself, ready for the worst. “You,” she hissed and everyone turned and stared at me. I presented them all with my very best fuck-me-I’m-rumbled smile.

“Hi.”

“This man was trespassing on our property last night! Spying on me!”

“Actually, I was trying to unwrap some barbed wire from my friend’s leg,” I replied, folding my arms. Shaw of course took the opportunity to step in, like the massive bellend he is.

“You caught him snooping?” he asked her and she ground her teeth.

“Him and another soldier, they sneaked in the garden while I was having a bath. I went outside and told them to get away.”

“What were you doing there, Wightman?” King asked, the only one who didn’t have a scowl or look of total disgust on his face. I sighed and shook my head.

“I was with Mick,” I started. “Mick Oliver. He told me there was something he wanted to show me, so he dragged me out there after everyone else headed to the lake. He tried scaling the fence but he slipped and ended up getting tangled in the bloody wire. Slashed his leg to pieces. He’s lucky I got him back to the doc so quick or he might’ve bled out.”

“What was he trying to show you?” King asked, but he already knew. They all fucking knew. They just wanted me to say it.

“Her,” I said, nodding at Emily. “But I didn’t know until I was already dragging him back here. He was babbling, saying she reminded him of his wife.”

“Has he done this before,” King asked and I shrugged.

“A few times, I think. But it’s nothing sinister, for fuck’s sakes, he just misses his bloody wife. She was killed in a robbery a month before he got

drafted, how's that for shitty luck? Poor bastard's been through all kinds of hell, worse than any of us."

"We've all been through hell," Shaw said. "It's no excuse to be a peeping tom, spying on women through their bloody windows."

"He's not a peeping tom," I shot back, "he's just a scared little boy who misses his wife. At least he's not some alcoholic miser with half a fucking hand." Shaw stared at me, stunned, and the silence that filled the room was nothing short of beautiful. Then his face twisted and he hurled himself at me, hands outstretched.

"Bastaaaard!"

Normally a pissed-up asshole like him wouldn't have even got close to me, but I was honestly shocked by his sudden lunge. Somehow he managed to snatch my collar and push me backwards and my shoulder blades slammed against the wall, not quite hard enough to hurt but with enough force to rattle my brain inside my skull. I grabbed him right back and twisted to the side and tossed him away. He tumbled into the table slab and I was ready to follow up with a right hook to the fucker's kidneys, but King suddenly leapt into action, diving between us glaring at me.

"What the hell's wrong with you," he yelled, "fighting in a bloody morgue?"

"Don't look at me," I bellowed back, "he was the one who started it!"

"I'm looking at both of you. Stop being so bloody childish." More silence and Shaw and I tossed each other a withering glare. My hands were still balled into fists and my arms were trembling, screaming out for action. Instead, I sucked down breath after breath of the foul air and backed off a step.

"Are we all done here?" I asked, folding my arms to stop them from shaking. King nodded.

"I'll speak with Lieutenant Oliver later," he said, then he turned back to Emily and started grovelling for forgiveness. I was already halfway out of the door, trying my best to ignore the cunts who were eyeballing me.

Outside I stormed towards the barracks, muttering and cursing and trying my absolute best not to kick the shit out of every last thing I passed. Eventually it was a crumbling remains of some old brick wall that got it. The burning in my belly just exploded and I let out a roar, slamming my heel into the fucker over and over until the top half gave way and collapsed backwards, throwing up a cloud of filth. At some point I must have bitten my tongue, hard, because blood was filling my mouth from a gash across the middle. I was breathing so fast that I suddenly felt dizzy, so I slumped down onto the remaining bricks and crushed my eyes shut and imagined all of the horrifically violent and agonisingly brutal things I would do to Shaw when I finally had the chance. The next time I caught him alone, when King wasn't around to step in, the bastard was going down. Hard.

## **Eleven (Adam)**

My cheeks were burning as I apologised to Emily, but thankfully that fire in her eyes died out as soon as Wightman left. If anything, she looked faintly relieved, until the sadness came trickling back. She cleared her throat again and stared down at her father.

"I need to know why this happened," she said. "It won't bring back my father, or Friedrich or Hetti. But I know I won't stop thinking about it, not if I don't know why." I scratched my chin and nodded slowly.

"Even if they were arguing, it was probably still just an accident," I said. "Maybe things got heated and one of them knocked something over. A candlestick or something."

"Then they just stood there and watched the place burn?" Emily glanced up at me like I was some silly schoolboy and I felt the heat crawl down my neck. She had a point there, I had to admit.

"Okay," I told her, "we'll ask around again, see if anyone can help. But I've got to tell you, we already tried your neighbours and they weren't too willing to talk with us."

“They don’t trust you,” she said, matter-of-factly. “After your friend’s little stunt last night, it’s hard to blame them.” I just stared back, running my tongue over my lips. Her mixed messages were starting to make my head hurt.

“Well, if you hear anything, let us know and we’ll look into it, alright?” She nodded back, then she stooped beside her father’s body and took his hand, a fresh tear running down her cheek. There was nothing more we could do, so I murmured a swift goodbye and turned and bugged off, with Shaw following at my heels. As I passed the next room along, I thought of LORIETT spread out on her slab, just a few feet from where I’d briefly met her. Was that really just a day ago? Jesus, my mind was so fogged up.

We continued back to the barracks at a gentle pace, like all of our energy had been sucked right out of us. It was almost a minute before Shaw broke the silence.

“Do you really think it might have been murder?” he asked and I shook my head.

“I don’t know. I mean, Jesus, I hope it was just some horrible accident, but what if that fire really was started deliberately? After everything else that’s happened, I’m starting to think this whole bloody town’s gone mad.”

“Not just the town,” Shaw said. “It’s the whole bloody world. Bollocks to it, and every last poor bastard stuck on it.” He peered at me with a peculiar expression. “What are we going to do about Turner?”

“Don’t really have much choice,” I replied, shoving my hands into my pockets. “If he really did kill her, and it’s looking that way, then it’s death by firing squad.”

“Christ. He must’ve been in another world. But could he really be that out of it and still manage to rape and strangle a girl? I mean, when I’ve had a couple of bottles of wine, it takes all my concentration just to pull my trousers off before climbing into bed. And even then, I sometimes forget to take my shoes off first.”

“I don’t know.” I shook my head and chewed my lower lip. “Depends what he was on. I just wish he remembered something about this girl he met



in Kungsbrucken. Even a first name would be better than nothing. Without that, we've got bugger all to go on."

"There's got to be something we can do," Shaw said, scratching his temple. "Can't we get a hypnotist to work with him, try and recover his memories maybe?"

"A hypnotist?" I smiled and glanced at him. "Where the hell are we supposed to find a hypnotist?"

"I don't know, it was just an idea." He looked put out, his face creasing as he frowned. "Or maybe some kind of brain doctor."

"I can try and get a neurologist shipped over," I said, "but I can predict right now what the Major will say. As far as he's concerned, we've got our man. He just wants it dealt with as quickly as possible, so we don't lose the faith of the locals."

"Huh," Shaw said with a sniff. "There's no faith left to lose."

That night was another sleepless one, at least as far as I could tell. Every time I felt like I was about to drift off, I'd see her face again, pale and lifeless, staring right at me. Then I'd bolt up in bed, sweating and shaking and craving one of my pills. I forced myself to go without, three or four times at least. By the fifth, I couldn't bear it any longer. I'd deliberately left that little bottle sat in my jacket, so I had to sneak up and soft-foot around my bunk and reach into the bloody thing without waking the three other men, all fellow lieutenants, all passed out under their sheets. I envied them so much, didn't understand how they could sleep so easily after all the shite they've seen.

The bottle lid came off with a pop and the magic pills rattled inside, piercing the silence. I froze and glanced back at my bunk mates, but they were still oblivious, still sleeping a dreamless sleep if they were lucky enough. When I was sure that no one would stir, I slipped a finger into the bottle and worked one of the pills into my palm. A moment later, the thing was dissolving in my belly and I was back in bed, staring up at the ceiling with its cobweb of cracks stretched from one wall to the other. This time, the pale face stayed buried as I felt the world slip away. But as I drifted, my thoughts suddenly shifted to Turner, curled up on the stone floor of his cell.

I wondered if he was haunted by that very same face, her stone eyes set on his as he squeezed his fingers around her throat, her lips parting, desperate to draw breath into her vacant lungs. Then I wondered: if a man like Turner was capable of an act so cruel and selfish, then aren't we all?

## **Twelve (Emily)**

That night was the longest of my life, even though it felt like some terrible dream. Almost nothing about it felt real, not the dusty old chair that I was slumped in or the rows of books stretched out in front of me. The only thing that had to be real was the chill that hung in the library. Somehow it was even colder in here than it was outside, or at least that's how it seemed.

I pulled the blanket up to my chin and breathed in the musty scent, my cheeks slowly turning numb. Already I knew there'd be no sleep tonight. There was too much going on in my head, the whole horror playing out from start to finish on endless repeat. He was gone and it was all my fault. If only I'd noticed the fire sooner, I could have got him out of there. If only I'd been stronger, I could have carried him out. If only...

After the fire, when my eyelids finally lifted and I found myself staring up at a murky orange sky, my mind took a while to catch up. The last thing I remembered was crawling down the stairs, my lungs heavy with smoke and soot. My throat still burned and it hurt to breathe, but here I was, still alive. At first I just thought I'd managed to crawl out to safety, but then another memory returned with the pain in my hands. A memory of falling against the shattered glass, before collapsing over my father. In a panic, I sat up and glanced around. I'd moved too fast and a pounding agony ripped through my skull, almost sending me straight back down, but the adrenaline was just about strong enough to push the pain aside. I squinted up at two figures stood over me, their faces gradually coming into focus. At first I thought the man on the left was my father, beaming down at me, but then I realised it was Arndt, the town librarian. At his side was Pieter, his only son, watching me with the curiosity of a cat.

“Thank the lord,” Arndt said, clasping his hands together. “I thought you might not ever wake.” His wrinkled face glowed, lit up by the fire which was still raging to my right. Most of the houses on that side of the street had already been consumed, flames and smoke pouring out from every shattered window.

“Where’s father,” I tried to ask, but my throat refused to let the words out and I ended up twisted sideways, coughing and choking and sucking up furious gasps of air. On the third attempt I finally managed to wheeze coherently. Immediately I knew the truth, when Arndt’s lips melted into a troubled frown. He shook his head and I almost collapsed, my heart pounding so hard.

“I’m sorry, there was nothing we could do. By the time I pulled him out, he was already gone.” He stepped aside and gestured with his arm, and when I peered across I saw my father, stretched out on his back across the pavement with his arms folded across his chest. His eyes were closed, as if he were sleeping.

I stayed with him until the English took his body away and even then I followed him to the morgue, unsure of what else to do. It was only then that I thought of the fire and what had caused it. Fran from across the street had told me the fire started at the Klingmanns’ place. She’d been drawing the curtains closed when she’d noticed the top floor of the house glowing, just moments before one of the windows shattered and smoke gushed out. Apparently it spread like hellfire and by the time she’d run out and alerted the Klingmanns’ other neighbours, a family with a teenage son and daughter, I was already being dragged out onto the street by Pieter.

Did I really hear a door slam downstairs, while those two were arguing upstairs? I wished now that I’d paid more attention, but even so I was still certain that the fire was malicious. Over and over I thought of every possible scenario, every way the fire could have started by accident, until my brain ached. Perhaps the fire started downstairs somehow, trapping them both upstairs; but then why did it spread across our top floor first? And they were both young, they could have just jumped out of the top floor window. So what if they really were asleep when the fire started, taking them by surprise? Surely not possible. I’d heard them arguing viciously just

ten or fifteen minutes before I noticed the fire had spread to our house. After a row that bad, I doubted they'd both sink straight into a deep sleep.

All I knew for sure was that I couldn't depend on the English for help. As far as I knew, it was one of them that started the fire. Trying to add a few more Germans to their kill list. I thought back to that Wightman thug and his friend, creeping into our garden to spy on me, and I pulled my legs up tight to my chest. Perhaps it had been them two again, taking their snooping a step further. I'd seen Wightman's kind before. The Nazi soldiers who did their duty because they believed in the cause, because they enjoyed their work. I'd seen the same anger and passion in their eyes.

Sunlight began to creep through the enormous windows at half past six, according to the endlessly ticking clock that was propped on a shelf over Arndt's check-out desk. But the windows were so filthy that the room didn't get bright until almost eight, just before the rattle of a key in a lock stirred me from my coma. I watched the door ease open and Arndt's face appeared. He looked deep in thought, his brow creased and his mouth twitching, but when he saw me staring back he broke into a wide smile.

"Hope you slept okay on that old thing," he said, dropping his keys on the desk. I tried to force a smile back, but it probably looked more like a grimace.

"I didn't really feel like sleeping," I replied, pulling the blanket away. The air was still frigid enough to make me shiver. "But thank you for letting me stay. I don't know what I would have done."

"Nonsense. You're more than welcome." He flapped his hands at his side, as if he had no idea what to do. "Would you like a hot drink?" he eventually asked. I nodded.

"Coffee, please." He nodded and moved to a tiny kitchen area, tucked away in the back corner of the room. I watched his back through the makeshift divide, formed of old book shelves. The library, until now completely silent, was suddenly filled with the screams of the kettle and the clinking of spoons against crockery. A moment later he returned and handed me a chipped orange mug.

"I'm afraid the coffee is quite weak," he said with a frown. "I can only afford a little per cup until some new supplies come in." I accepted the coffee with a dazed thank you and clutched the mug tight, staring blankly at the floor as the bitter aroma steamed around me.

Arndt busied himself with tidying away books and mopping the floor and I was completely oblivious until the coffee had cooled in my hands. One of the old books slamming down onto the floorboards eventually roused me from my stupor. I watched Arndt slowly bend to retrieve it and shook myself awake, throwing the lukewarm coffee down my throat and pushing out of the chair.

"Can I help?" I asked as he replaced the book on his tiny trolley. He peered at me and smiled.

"Very kind, but it's all in hand." He continued to replace the books on the shelves and I stood at his side, feeling completely out of place.

"I don't know how to thank you," I finally said. "For pulling me out of the house."

"Don't thank me," Arndt said with a throaty cackle. "Pieter did most of the pulling. I might be doing okay for my age, but there's no substitute for youth."

"I'll be sure to thank him too." I cleared my throat and clenched my hands together. "Last night, when you saw the houses were burning...did you see anything suspicious?"

"Suspicious?" He paused, a stack of books clutched between his hands. A troubled expression crossed his face. "What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know," I admitted, squeezing the skin between my eyes. A throbbing pain pulsed through my brow, sharp enough to make me wince. "Did you see any of the English soldiers, maybe pass them just a little earlier?"

"Emily," Arndt said, slipping the books onto a shelf and dusting his hands on his trousers. "You think the English started the fire?"

"I really don't know. I just heard some things, a few minutes before the fire spread. And if it really did start at the Klingmanns', why did they not

get out? How did they burn to death in there?”

“It’s strange, for certain,” he replied with a shrug. “But why would you think the English are to blame? I don’t like them being here any more than the rest of the town, but would they really do something like this?”

“They’re animals,” I said, teeth clenched. “I caught two of them spying on me the night before. And there’s rumours that it was a soldier who murdered Lorieta Schmidt. I wouldn’t be surprised if they killed her grandfather too and just blamed it on Herr Jurgen.” Arndt stared back at me, his nostrils flaring with every raspy breath.

“Be careful who you say these things to,” he told me, his voice taking a sinister tone. “You don’t want to make them your enemy. I think you’re right, I think that they’re reckless and they’re capable of almost anything. So saying these things, it only invites more problems.” He glanced down at his trolley and let out a long sigh, suddenly looking even older than his fifty five years. I folded my arms tight across my chest, clutching my own shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” I said, “but I need to find out what happened. All night I sat awake, pouring over it again and again. I know I’ll do the same tonight and the night after that, until I find out who killed my father.”

“And then what?” he asked, glancing towards the door as if someone might be listening. “What if it was one of them who started the fire? Or several of them? What will you do?”

“I’ll find a way to give my father and the Klingmanns justice,” I replied. “I don’t know how, but I’ll make sure the ones who did this pay.”

“This sounds rather like a flight of fancy, my dear. Don’t forget, justice is a very different beast in the eyes of each man. The English, they think they stand for justice and freedom and now here we are, supposedly living free, but nothing has changed. We still have our masters. We still live under laws that we did not choose.” He leaned against the trolley and ran his tongue over dry, cracked lips. “We’re nothing to them, Emily, nothing but a pest. And if we show any discontent, they’ll use their justice to break us, just like the Nazis did. Your father wouldn’t want that for you. He’d want you to just live your life.”

Inside, a storm of emotions was tearing me apart; rage, hurt, despair, all hot and bitter in my belly. I wanted to reach inside and pull out the dark feelings that crept through me like decay, rotting my innards. Sickened, I clutched my stomach and dug my fingernails in, battling down the nausea.

“I know,” I gasped, “I know you’re right.” All of my tears were already spent, so I just stood there, trembling slightly, before finally turning and grabbing my coat from the floor beside the chair. “I need to go out, walk a little and clear my head.”

“You’re welcome to stay here as long as you need,” Arndt said, his voice soft. I forced a tiny smile, thanked him and then hurried out.

### **Thirteen (Katherine)**

Pieter raised his fist and held it in front of my face, the grazed knuckles shaking just two inches from my nose. He left it there so I could get a good look at it, then he made me swear again.

“I swear,” I told him, scowling over his hand. He’d only made Thomas swear the once, on his mother’s life, but because I didn’t have a mother, Pieter had thought up something different.

“Twenty hits,” he said, leaning in. His breath smelled like stale old meat, hot and salty. I wrinkled my nose.

“Twenty hits, as hard as you like. Come on, what is it?”

“Follow me.”

He took us around the back of his house, to the yard where his father grew turnips and potatoes. Herr Mikelson - or Arndt as he made us call him - was already at the library, so there was no chance that he’d catch us snooping back here, but I still couldn’t help glancing over my shoulder at the darkness behind the windows. I kept expecting a face to appear, gazing silently out at us.

“This way,” Pieter said, leading us past the vegetable patches and the small hand-drawn cart filled with old blankets, until we came to a rickety shed. The thing looked about ready to collapse, but Pieter climbed up onto a barrel and then hoisted himself onto the shed’s roof with a kick of his legs. Thomas and me gawped at him from below. I had this familiar sickening feeling, where part of me wanted the whole thing to collapse with Pieter on top. I imagined him dropping inside and the wooden walls folding down on top of him as he screamed and yelled, and us dancing around the ruins and mocking him. But my daydreams scattered when he tossed down an old brown sack that landed with a clatter just a step away, then a moment later he was clambering down again with something big clutched in one hand. He dropped down next to me and held it up with a grin.

“What do you think?” he asked. I stared at the thing, trying to figure out what it was. It looked like nothing more than a curved stick with some wire tied between the two ends. But if I told him that, he'd probably thump me and give me a dead arm. So I just pretended to study it and waited for Thomas to speak up.

“Does it work?” he eventually asked, a mix of excitement and nervousness. Pieter didn't seem to hear him. He was just flexing the wire with that stupid faraway look on his face. I watched him for a little while, then I reached down and picked up the bag. The thing was quite light and it felt like it had nothing more than a bunch of sticks in it, but when I opened it up I saw a row of metal points aiming up at my face.

“Careful with them,” Pieter hissed, reaching in and plucking out one of the sticks. It was long and thin and it had a spiked metal tip wedged at one end and feathers stuck to the other. It looked like some kind of torture device. I pictured him tickling Thomas with the feathers, then turning it over and jabbing the point into him over and over. But instead he rested the feathery end against the wire and then pulled back, pointing the spiky end at the old hand cart. He paused for a second and then let go of the wire. The stick shot out at a terrifying speed with a sharp whistling sound and the tip buried itself in the wooden wheel.

“Woyyyy!” Thomas barked in delight, his eyes as big as two moons. “Can I have a go?”



“Let's go somewhere else,” Pieter said. “Sometimes my father closes the library and comes home for lunch.”

“Why don't you want him to know about the bow?” Thomas asked and Pieter snorted.

“He thinks I'm inside all day, reading books. I haven't really read a thing in weeks, I've been making this instead. If he knew, he'd try and kick my arse. But I'll use the bow to catch us some meat and then he'll see, it's a good idea. Can't catch a bird or a rabbit with books.”

“So where can we go?” Thomas asked.

“We could go to my garden,” I offered and they turned and stared at me. “It's big and no one ever comes by.”

“Okay,” Pieter said, tucking the bow into the sack and gripping the whole lot under his arm. “Let's go.”

Already it was gone eleven according to the rusty clock stuck in the side of the rathaus, so the town platz was busy with people buying and selling. Of course, there were only half as many market stalls as there had been before the English arrived. Some of the travelling traders hadn't returned since the change, or if they did, they only had a few scraps to sell.

I was so busy watching two old men curse and argue over a small bag of tomatoes that I almost walked straight into Fraulein Hanna. I skidded and stopped just in time, before stepping back and apologising. She dropped her head and started down at me, but it felt like she was looking right through me, like I was a ghost she could only vaguely sense. Pieter had told me all about last night's fire and how he'd dragged Fraulein Hanna out of her burning house. Her father too, but he'd already been dead. I'd have been boasting all about it to everyone I saw, but he'd told me like it was some boring thing he did every day, as dull as putting on trousers or picking his teeth.

“Sorry about your house and your father,” I told her. The sad eyes blinked twice, then swivelled and focused on Pieter.

“I never got a chance to thank you,” Fraulein Hanna said, pulling her hair out of her face and sweeping it behind one ear.

“What for?” Pieter asked and Fraulein Hanna frowned and shuffled her feet.

“For last night, for getting me out of the house.” Beside me, Pieter shrugged.

“It’s nothing. If I hadn’t done it, someone else would have.”

“Well, thank you, all the same.” Fraulein Hanna looked a little nervous, chewing on her lip as if she had some terrible secret and she wasn’t sure whether to share it or not. Finally she sighed. “This might sound strange, but did you see any of the English soldiers hanging around last night, before you saw the fire?”

“I don’t remember,” Pieter replied and I could tell by his tone that he was getting impatient. Fraulein Hanna didn’t seem to pick up on it though.

“Okay. It’s just, I thought I heard someone maybe breaking into the house next door, just before the fire started.”

“The Klingmanns’ place you mean?” I asked. She turned back to me and nodded, her hair falling out of place again and tumbling across one eye. That seemed to make something in Pieter’s brain click.

“I did see that crazy Jenna sitting alone in the square,” he said with a snort. “She was crying or something.”

“She’s been acting all funny the past couple of days,” I added, trying to be helpful. “I think her and Herr Klingmann had a falling out.” Fraulein Hanna’s eyes narrowed and she shook her head.

“You mean Jenna Lemann?”

“Yep,” I said with a nod.

“How did she know Friedrich Klingmann?” Fraulein Hanna asked. She sounded confused and I guessed she hadn’t heard all the gossip that had been going around for the past couple of days.

“They were...seeing each other,” I said, feeling my cheeks heat up. “But I think Jenna’s husband Theodor found out.”

“Right,” Thomas said, nodding enthusiastically. “He was steaming mad. He ran off to Kungsbrucken to get away. He’s probably drinking with whores and getting his own back.”

“Sweet lord,” Fraulein Hanna whispered. “Friedrich was having an affair with that girl?” She shook her head and sniffed. “Him and Hetti always seemed so...close. So in love.”

“We’ve got to go,” Pieter said, cutting in. He nodded at me and Thomas, then he started off without waiting for a goodbye from Fraulein Hanna. She seemed so trapped in her own thoughts that she didn’t even notice us wander off and when I glanced back over my shoulder, she was still stood in the same place, her shoulders hunched up and her head bowed.

I forgot all about it when we arrived back at my house. We headed straight for the garden and Pieter pulled out his bow and piled up the arrows, about a dozen in all.

“What should we use for a target?” Thomas asked, bubbling with excitement again. I glanced around and my eyes fell on a bent old pail sat half-buried in mud near the fence.

“How about that?” I wandered over and pulled it free, scraping the mud off with my fingers and taking care not to get any on my dress. Pieter’s lips crept up at the edges, until he looked like a startled wolf.

“Put it on your head,” he told me, stooping to grab an arrow before sliding it into the bow. I paused, the pail gripped in my hands.

“What?”

“Put it on your head.” He flexed the wire, pulling it back a little until it was tight before lifting the bow and aiming the arrow straight at me. My stomach lurched and I tumbled backwards, my back slamming against the fence.

“Don’t do that,” I yelled, twisting my body sideways and lifting the pail so it half covered my face. The metal tip of the arrow trembled over his fingers and I knew that any second now he’d release the wire, either deliberately or not, and that point would stab its way into my flesh.

“Pieter,” Thomas said and he started to protest, but Pieter shut him up just by turning and scowling at him.

“You want to wear it instead?” he asked and Thomas shook his head and clamped his mouth shut. Pieter let his gaze linger a little, then he turned back to me and sighed. “Go on, I won’t hit you. I’m a great shot with this thing.”

“Piss off,” I hollered back and I tossed the pail to the side, where it bounced across the hard dirt and nestled in the trench beside the fence. Pieter’s face hardened but the bow didn’t come down. That arrow was still pointed at me, the tip quivering even faster now and I wished I’d never brought him here. I didn’t even want to touch that stupid bow, what good was it anyway? All I wanted to do was sprint inside and slam the door shut and keep him away, but I couldn’t convince my body to move. So I just stood there, staring back at him and breathing so hard I thought my chest might explode, praying that Katz would suddenly leap out through the hole in the fence and dig his teeth into Pieter’s arm and rip it off at the socket. I felt Herr Jurgen’s grip tighten around my throat again, crushing me against his chest and I smelled the stink of sweat pouring from him. Pieter suddenly wasn’t Pieter any more, he was Adam King, English Captain. He was there to protect me, to rescue me. My heart was pounding fast, far too fast, making me sick. Then Adam King was gone and it was just Pieter again, that angry look still burning bright.

I saw him pull back the wire a little further, the wood creaking under the stress, then he closed one eye and peered down the length of the arrow and his fingers snapped away, letting the thing fly loose. By the time I heard the twang of the bow, the deadly metal point was already flying towards me. I had no time to move or try and duck out of the way. All I managed to do was crush my eyes shut and tense every muscle, as if that would somehow make the arrow bounce off my skin.

The thud as the metal tip struck its target made me cry out. My eyes flew open again and I turned to see the arrow shuddering in the fence, so close that I could reach out and touch the thing. I turned and stared at Pieter and he lowered the bow, a content look on his face.

“See,” he said. “Told you I wouldn’t hit you.”

## **Fourteen (Adam)**

When I unlocked the door to the cells the next morning, I noticed a young woman dressed in a light red jacket lingering close by. She was stood just across the street, near the door of the tiny pharmacy which also doubled as a shoe repair store. The store was still closed and at first I guessed she was either suffering from the squits or in dire need of a boot reheeling, but a little later, when I wandered outside to smoke and feel the sun on my face, she was still stood there. By then the store was open, its front door wedged open to let some fresh air in, yet she was planted in the same spot, staring right at me. As soon as she noticed me peering back, she turned away and started rooting through her bag, maybe just pretending to be busy until I headed back inside. Sure enough, when I returned to the cells and glanced out through the tiny round window, she had finished messing around with her bag and was just staring again.

Turner wasn't communicating much at this point, although he was definitely awake and – unless Shaw had slipped him something while my back was turned – a hundred percent sober. That just made his behaviour all the more disturbing. Currently, he was hunched down in his favourite spot, arms wrapped around his legs, rocking back and forth ever so slightly while staring at the wall. I paused by his bars for a moment, then cleared my throat.

“You want anything to eat or drink?” I asked. He replied without looking over.

“No. No, thank you.” His voice was little more than a croak, as if he'd just crawled on his belly through a desert.

“Alright, well, I'll get you some water and leave it in case you change your mind. I'll be just around the corner if you need anything. Shout if you need the bucket emptying.”

For the next five minutes I sat in the bumpy metal chair near the door, reading some old romance novel about a couple stranded on a desert island. It was so lovey dovey and sickly sweet that I thought I might retch into the spare bucket, until miraculously Shaw staggered in through the door and interrupted me. I squinted up at him, framed in the doorway by a haze of sunlight like some cranky hungover deity.

“Jesus,” I said. “What time is it? Did I pass out and lose three hours?”

“No,” he muttered back, pushing a hand over his mouth as he yawned. “Just couldn’t sleep. Thought I’d crawl up and see what the morning looked like these days.” He sniffed and scratched his cheek. “Still pretty miserable, then.”

“I like it,” I replied, closing the book and tossing it down by my side. “Everyone else is still sleeping off the booze and the place is all quiet.” I wasn’t lying, either. I liked the mornings so much that I usually didn’t sink a pill until around noon, or maybe a little earlier if the dreams were worse than usual.

“Quiet’s overrated,” Shaw said. He leaned against the wall and peered down the row of cells. “How’s our man holding up?”

“Not too good. He’s just sitting there and sort of rocking back and forth.” I sighed and pushed out of the chair, rubbing the base of my spine with my knuckles. That bloody seat was so hard, you could practically feel your spine re-aligning after just a few seconds. “I’m going to speak with the Major in a bit. Let him make the final decision.”

“You know what that’ll be,” Shaw said with a grimace. “Remember Walliams?”

“Aye, how could I forget.” I’d been standing just ten feet away from Andrew Walliams when he turned and fled from a Nazi barricade formed of tanks and grenade launchers. The poor bastard made it all of ten feet before catching a bullet in his hip, but rather than try and pull him back to safety, the Major ordered Moss to put another one in his skull. Walliams had been deserting after all, an offence punishable by death. “But he’s not the same man these days,” I told Shaw. “Just look at us. Where’s the discipline gone?”

Drinking until dawn, sleeping until noon. It's all gone to hell and the Major doesn't even bat an eyelid." Shaw shrugged.

"This is different, though. If things turn sour with the locals, it makes him look bad, especially with the bigwigs as he puts it. He'll want Turner's bollocks just to stop the town from rioting and to keep the crusties happy."

I frowned and shook my head, but I knew he was right. The Major was hacked off with the whole occupation, the sitting around waiting for something to happen, and maybe that was why he allowed a little drinking and gambling and other recreational activities. But this was something else altogether. I was just glad to pass on the decision, because even though Turner had the blood of an innocent on his hands, I don't think I could've ordered one of my fellow soldiers put to death.

I'd already smoked my one remaining cigarette, which I'd nicked off one of the Lieutenants, but Shaw was kind enough to give me one of my old ones back – to be repaid in full when I had the means, of course. We stepped outside and I was about to light up when I saw that girl again. She was stood a little closer now and she eyeballed us as we emerged, a strange expression twisting her face. I nodded to her but she turned away and immediately started to walk off, head bowed. For a second I watched her go, but my curiosity by now was overwhelming. I grabbed the fag dangling from my lips and slipped it into my pocket as I took off after her, the sound of my boots slapping against the concrete ringing out from the surrounding buildings. Shaw was probably still stood on the doorstep, gawping and wondering what the hell had gotten into me.

When I rounded the corner, I staggered to a standstill. The street ahead was empty, no sign of her anywhere. I wondered if she'd just been some kind of apparition all along, a hallucination cast out by my feverish mind, but when I turned to shuffle back I caught a flash of red in an alleyway opposite and saw her back disappear around another bend. My heart was racing by now and I bolted after her again, my jacket catching the breeze and flapping up behind me. Ten seconds later I burst out at the other end, once more slowing and peering around. This time she was in plain sight, her dark hair tumbling down her shoulders and swaying side to side as she hurried towards the main square. Some of the locals had already visited the market and were heading in the opposite direction clutching their meagre

gatherings; a couple of carrots, or a lumpy radish. They watched me jog by, shooting me the usual range of looks. One young boy smiled at me, but the older folk either frowned or scowled, at least the ones who dared to glance my way. I ignored them all and caught up with the girl after thirty paces.

“Hey,” I said, coming around her and stopping in her path. She stopped and stared at me with wide, terrified eyes, one hand crushed against her chest. “I saw you hanging around outside,” I continued, suddenly worried that she was about to pass out in front of me, which would of course go down really well with any spectators.

“No,” she said, shaking her head and moving to her left, trying to push past me. I stepped to the side, blocking her retreat.

“Yes, you were stood across the street for half an hour, just looking over.”

“Not here,” she whispered, peering at another woman who strode by us with a curious glance. “I won’t speak with you here.”

“Alright,” I said, suddenly desperate to hear what she had to say. “Should we go back?”

“No,” she replied with a shake of her head. “I’ll be there later. Please, leave me, let me go.” She went to slide by me again and this time I didn’t move in her way. She breezed past and I stood there for a moment, thinking over what just happened, before I started back towards the cells.

When I got there, Wightman was stood outside with his arms folded and a fag stuck in his mouth. He was wearing the kind of dark expression that suggested he might try and kick a cat across the street, or push an old lady down a particularly steep staircase. I watched the smoke curl up around his cheeks and remembered my own cigarette, still stuck away in my pocket. I pulled it free and lit up, sucking down the nicotine. For a little while we stood at opposite sides of the doorway, smoking and staring at nothing at all. He was the first to eventually speak, mumbling with the fag still perched in his lips.

“What exciting shite do we have planned for today, then?”

“I’m going to speak with your stalker friend,” I replied, tapping the cigarette so the column of ash tumbled away and landed beside my shoe.



“You can go and speak with Emily Hanna. Apologise for breaking into her back garden and scaring the living crap out of her, then see if there’s anything you can do to help her and the other fire victims.” Wightman grunted.

“What am I gonna do, build them all new houses to live in?”

“Well, that’d be a good start,” I said. Wightman shrugged.

“Just as long as I don’t need to stand within breathing distance of that other prick,” he said, stamping out his fag and most likely pretending it was Shaw’s face. I breathed out sharply through my nostrils.

“You two are going to have to make up and get along. He doesn’t want to be stuck here any more than you do.”

“Are you joking? He fucking loves it. He can sit around boozing all day and night and no one gives a shit.”

“He never used to be like that,” I said, thinking that none of us used to be like this. Not during the war, not back home. Wightman smiled and shook his head, shifting his weight from one foot to the other and back again.

“Well, he’s like that now. Drunken, miserable prick.” He was speaking just loud enough for Shaw to hear from inside and I half expected the bugger to come flying out before lamping Wightman in the face, but thankfully the door stayed shut. “Turner’s completely lost his shit in there,” he continued, rubbing his neck and wincing. “I tried speaking with him but he’s just bobbing his head and muttering to himself. Mental bastard.”

“You might go a little crazy too if you found out you’d strangled a girl while you were smashed out of your skull,” I said. But then, I wondered, was that really true? Wightman had probably killed as many people as the rest of the squad put together and not all of them had been Nazis toting guns. He was so grenade-happy that he’d taken down at least a couple of poor wretches who’d simply been in a terrible place at a terrible time.

I was still curious about that girl in the red coat and whatever secret she wanted to tell me so badly, just before her nerves failed her. There was still no sign of her half an hour later, so I sent Wightman off to help with the clean-up operation, while Shaw tried to get some sense out of the catatonic Turner. Wightman grumbled a bit but not too strongly, most likely happy to see the back of us. Meanwhile, I waited outside and watched for the girl. The insects had started crawling around in my belly again, so I stepped around the corner and checked that no one was in sight before sneaking one of my magic pills. The bloody thing stuck in my throat and it took almost a minute for me to force it down, swallowing over and over until finally it crept into my stomach. I thought I was going to be sick from the effort, so I hunched down and sucked in a dozen deep breaths, clutching my head in my hands.

When the dizziness and the nausea finally passed and I staggered back around the corner, the red coat was the first thing I saw. She was glancing around awkwardly as she crossed the street, but when she turned and saw me she paused, a slightly stunned expression stuck on her face. I dragged a sleeve across my mouth, hoping I hadn’t drooled all down myself, then I headed over.

“Hi,” I called out, raising a hand. The girl stared back, twitching as if she were about to turn and sprint away, but instead she checked over her shoulder and then nodded at the door.

“Can we go inside?” she asked, her voice hushed.

“Of course, aye, let’s go.”

I led her inside the building and shut the door behind us, buzzing with anticipation. The pill was already working its magic, calming my stomach and laying down a nice, fat layer of fuzz across my brain. She peered at Shaw, who was sat on the crooked metal chair in front of Turner’s cell, then she stepped into the corner, out of the way, and pulled nervously at the sleeve of her coat. I swiftly joined her, turning my back on the cells.

“So, first things first. I’m Captain Adam King, and you are...”

“Jenna,” she said, shuffling her feet. “Jenna Lemann.”

“What can I do for you, Jenna?” I asked, crossing my arms. She chewed on her lower lip for a moment, maybe still arguing with herself about whether to tell me or not, before finally taking a breath and launching into it.

“I heard some things,” she said, glancing up at me for a second before her eyes dipped again. “About what happened to Loriatt. The whole town is talking about it.”

“What are they saying?” I asked, cursing whatever slack-mouthed bastard was feeding information to the locals. You couldn’t even miss your morning bowel movements without the entire population somehow hearing about it.

“They say,” she began, then she faltered, turning her head and crushing her eyelids shut. “They say she was raped and then strangled.” Her voice was just a whisper now, barely loud enough for me to make out. I tapped my foot and thought carefully about my reply.

“It’s true,” I finally told her. “We’ve got the man who did it.” She raised her head and stared me in the eye and her jaw trembled.

“No,” she said. “No, it’s not him.”

For a while, all I could do was stand there, most likely with some kind of gormless look on my face. Eventually I shook myself out of the stupor and smiled.

“Sorry, what?”

“It’s not James Turner,” she said, her hands clenched into fists. “He’s the wrong man, he couldn’t have done it!”

“How do you know?” I asked. My heart was pounding again, the comforting layer of fuzz dissolving away.

“I just do,” she replied, eyes glistening. I sighed and shook my head.

“You’re going to have to do better than that.” She looked truly terrified now, like a trapped animal ready to fight for her life. I shuffled back half a step to give her some breathing room. It took a moment, but finally she broke and the whole story came pouring out.

“I’m married to a man I don’t love,” she began, an unexpected start but she had my attention. “We fight all the time, sometimes bad fights. He grabs my hair and pulls it hard, slaps my face. Usually he throws me down.” She wrapped her arms around herself and I noticed her fearful look twisting into something closer to bitterness. “Usually he waits until we’re alone in our home, but a few nights ago he decided he was brave enough to hit me in public. He thought we were alone, but James Turner was there. He saw it all.” Now a flicker of a smile crossed her lips. “He came straight over and without a word he punched my husband in the gut. The bastard went down without a fight.”

“Glad to hear it,” I said. “But what’s this got to do with the murder?”

“James Turner is a good man,” she replied. “He wouldn’t do these things to a woman, raping and killing her.” I frowned, wondering just how much I should tell her.

“Look, I understand he helped you and you think he’s a good person, but you can’t tell me he’s innocent of murder just because he beat the crap out of your abusive husband.”

“But I know he’s innocent,” Jenna insisted, clutching her hands in front of her chest as if she were praying. “I know it!”

“He’d had a bit to drink that night, he wasn’t thinking straight-” I said, but she cut me off.

“After he dealt with my husband, James Turner took me home.” Her whole body was trembling by now and a tear slipped down her cheek, nestling on her top lip. “I wanted him to know how much it meant to me. And I wanted to get my own revenge by having another man in our bed.”

“So you two...” I started, but I trailed off when she shook her head.

“No. I made him come inside the house and I tried to convince him, but he had no interest. I thought maybe he had a woman back home, he was trying to be faithful. But I don’t think he does.” She shook her head again and sniffed and I raised an eyebrow.

“Wait, are you saying you don’t think James Turner was interested because he might be gay?”

“I’m sure,” Jenna said and I had to bite my tongue. The lady was clearly confident in her sex appeal. “But even if he wasn’t gay, does that sound like someone who would rape and kill a woman, drunk or not?”

“But he was there,” I muttered, my mind churning almost as fast as my heart. “There’s a lot of evidence that says he’s the one who killed her.” Jenna stared back at me, the tear trail still shining on her cheek.

“I just needed to tell you,” she finally said, then she side-stepped around me and hurried out of the door without another word. I turned just as the door clattered shut again, my mouth hanging wide open.

“Shit,” I whispered, running my fingers through my hair and pressing down on my skull. So it wasn’t over, not yet. What if Turner really wasn’t the murderer? What if he’d just somehow stumbled across the murderer disposing of the body? Or some other tragic circumstances had led to him being there, at that exact moment? How the bloody hell could I march into the Major’s office and present the evidence, knowing that it’d send a potentially innocent man in front of a firing squad?

I paced over to Turner’s cell. Shaw was still squatting in front of the bars, trying his best to get any kind of reaction from the lad, and by the looks of it so far failing. The poor bastard was still crushed up into his corner, eyes

fixed forwards, head bobbing like a loon. I slipped the key into the lock and drew back the bars, stepping inside.

“Careful, mind,” Shaw said behind me. “He’s gone in the head. He might try and bite your knees off or something.”

“Turner,” I said, crouching in front of him, directly in his line of sight. The Lieutenant didn’t flinch, didn’t blink. I swallowed and sucked up a lungful of the musty air. “Lieutenant James Turner!” This time his irises narrowed and his lips twitched and I got the feeling he was listening. “Turner, do you remember a girl called Jenna Lemann?” Another twitch, then his tongue swept over his lips and he croaked a reply.

“Yes.”

“You stepped in when her husband was beating her around?”

“Yes.” A little softer this time, his head dipping slightly.

“Alright,” I said. “What happened after? When you escorted her home?”

That got a reaction alright, but not the kind I expected. Turner’s eyes suddenly blazed and he shook his head ferociously and I stumbled backwards, afraid that he was ready to lunge again. My arse hit the ground and a shockwave of pain bounced up my spine. I tensed, ready to roll back onto my feet, but Turner wasn’t about to attack. Instead, he pulled his arms up over his head and buried his face away.

“Just leave me alone,” he muttered, over and over, until finally I pushed myself back up and stepped out of the cell, pushing the door back into place. Shaw grimaced, peering in through the bars.

“Told you,” he said, “that man’s had it. Something’s snapped in that brain of his.”

“This isn’t right,” I said, watching as Turner shook and trembled on the ground. “We’re missing something big here.”

“Like what?”

“I’ve got no bloody clue.” I turned to Shaw and frowned. “But we need to go to Kungsbrucken and find out what happened to him that night.”

## **Fifteen (Terry)**

I'd be the first to admit that I had fuck all clue what I was doing. Back home I'd spent plenty of time with coppers, but it was always on opposite sides of a set of bars. I always said that the only reason they let me sign up was to get me out of the country and out of their hair. When it came to doing police work, though, I didn't have the faintest. All I knew was, you track down the culprits somehow, you hit 'em hard and then job's a good 'un.

I was all ready to say bollocks to the lot of them, that big-mouthed bint and the pair of pricks I'd been lumped with, but then what else was I gonna do? Sit around scratching my arse and patting my head all day? So I headed back to that street, now featuring a row of burned-out brick shells on one side. A fair few of the locals and just as many uniformed lads were shifting the remains into wheelbarrows and generally picking through the ruins, occasionally lifting out blackened bits of furniture or charred clothes and shaking their heads. I lit up a fag and watched for a bit, then I headed into the fray.

Moss and Kali were lingering at the perimeter, kicking through some rubble and generally avoiding any graft, so I sauntered up to them first.

"Looking for trophies?" I asked and Moss looked up, grinning like a naughty child.

"Supposed to be assessing the houses that are still standing," he replied, hoisting up a blackened lampshade. "Not exactly much worth nicking from this lot." He gave me a curious nod. "What you doing here, eh? If you want another squint at that German bird, you'll have to piss off to the library. She's holed up there with that old fella, the one with the hairy ears."

"Thanks," I said through gritted teeth. No one knew how to push my buttons better than Moss, not even Mick. This bastard was some sort of expert wide-up merchant; he had a sixth sense for getting right on

someone's tits in the shortest possible time. "Try not to sprain anything," I told him, kicking my way back through the rubble.

"You too, chum," he called after me.

I couldn't see anything worth doing around the site, so I headed straight for the library instead. Even when I was stood outside the front door, I honestly didn't know what I was supposed to do there. Apologise? Apologise for *what*? I hadn't been sneaking a peek, I wasn't some fucking pervert. She should apologise to *me* for lashing out and almost clawing my eyeball from its socket, then landing me in a massive heap of shite back at the morgue. The more I thought about it, the madder it made me, until I was ready to kick down the bloody door and storm my way in there like an angel of vengeance. I was set to do it an' all, until some little voice perked up and said maybe it wasn't such a good idea, that maybe raging at this Hanna woman would just make everything ten times worse. Maybe get me hammered by the Major and relegated to an even worse duty; a fate worse than spending time with that up-his-own-arsehole prick, if such a thing existed.

Somehow I managed to restrain myself, breathing hard through my nostrils right there on the library's doorstep until the anger dissolved and the calm settled over me like a fluffy blanket. Then I sighed out all the bad feelings and reached out and pushed the door open.

The library wasn't really what I expected, although admittedly I'd probably shot up more of the things than I'd actually stepped inside. Obviously there were a few shelves crammed full with tattered hardbacks, although not as many as you'd think given the size of the place. But it was the rest of the room that was so bloody strange. It looked more like some kind of posh, eccentric manor house or maybe even a museum. Enormous paintings hung on the walls, all of crusty geezers in uniform, while here and there, sat on wooden plinths and bare shelves, there were a selection of exhibits. One was a helmet with what looked like bullet holes riddling the surface, while another was an old pistol that looked like it might crumble into dust if you tried to pick it up. Just the kind of random shit I'd expect some mental kraut to collect.



I wandered between two rows of books and found myself at a squat desk covered in all kinds of crap, mostly books and scraps of paper all piled up. Sat behind it with a pen in one hand was the old coot Moss had mentioned, complete with thick glasses and a wispy tangle of cotton sprouting from each earhole. I beamed a smile and nodded.

“Uhh, I’m looking for Emily Hanna,” I told him and his eyes scrunched up tight. The tip of his purple tongue darted out and dragged across leathery lips.

“Are you, indeed,” he replied. “What do you want with her?” I didn’t like the old fogey’s tone, so I put some edge into mine and dropped the smile.

“She wanted some help, with the fire. I’m that help.”

“She doesn’t need any help,” the librarian said, shaking his head. “Not from you.”

“Hey,” I shot back, planting both sets of knuckles on the desk and leaning across the piles until my face was right up to his. “It’s not up to you, old man. Where the hell is she?” That seemed to rile him and he pushed backwards in his chair, eyes suddenly wide again. His chin started to quiver slightly and I thought he might pass out or collapse dead with a heart attack, which would serve the old fruitbat right. But that meddlesome little voice piped up again. Maybe killing this moron, accidentally or otherwise, might be a bad idea. There’d be witnesses, saw me coming into the building and leaving again straight after. I’d end up in the cell next to Turner for sure, listening to his mental ravings all day and bloody night, with that bastard Shaw leering in at me through the bars, having a good old gloat. So I backed off and folded my arms instead, then allowed the grin to rest on my face again. “Look, I’m sorry about that, I didn’t mean to shout. I just need to speak with her, that’s all. Then I’ll leave you to get on with all this crap.” I swept a hand at the heaps of junk and the old coot stared back with some kind of stupid expression.

“She’s not here,” he finally replied, gently placing the pen on the desk and locking his fingers together.

“Right, I can see that,” I said, glancing down the empty aisle. “Business always this good? You must keep pretty busy.”

“Please, leave,” he shot back, and there was nothing of the please about it. He wanted me gone, out of his face, the sooner the better. Unfortunate for him, then, that the door suddenly swung open and Emily Hanna stepped in, looking even more haggard and pale than the old man. I turned to him and winked.

“You’ve got a customer, Fritz. Don’t get up, I’ll handle this one for you. You just rest your old bones now.”

Emily wasn’t too pleased to see me. In fact, she stopped dead in the aisle when she finally noticed me standing there. Most of her face dropped an inch or so, except for her eyebrows, which leapt right up her forehead. Her eyes flicked to the side, to where the librarian was sat. Something loud and a little frantic came pouring from her lips in her native tongue and the old coot replied in the same, the pair of them jabbering back and forth while I stood there, hands clasped in front of me, waiting for them to shut the hell up. The conversation got more and more animated, until finally I waved my hand in front of Emily. She turned to me with fire blazing in her eyes.

“If you’re talking about me,” I told her, “you mind speaking in English?”

“What are you doing here?” she demanded, physically shaking like it took every ounce of strength she had not to step up and throw a fist into my face. I smiled.

“Last night you were crying out for help, saying someone torched your house. Well, I’m your help.”

“You?” She let out a noise that was somewhere between a laugh and a bark and her lips curled back, making her look like a particularly ugly mongrel. “You’re no help. It could be you who started the fire, you and your stupid friend!”

“My stupid friend is laid up in infirmary with his leg split open,” I snarled. “And he’d sooner slit his own throat than hurt anyone.”

“So that’s why he’s a soldier,” she said. “He never shot at any Germans? He just sat in your bunkers and made the tea for everyone?”

“You know what,” I replied, stepping towards her and pushing my face close to hers, just like I had with that wrinkly old librarian. I was so close I

could feel her breath on my cheek and see the veins popping across the surface of her eyeballs. “Sod it, then. You’re on your own. Your neighbours probably burned their own house down, with them still in it, just so they didn’t have to listen to you yammering on any more.” My voice had risen on its own accord until I was almost bellowing, but she just kept on glaring back, her head turned slightly away and her nostrils flaring. I shook my head and pushed around her, headed for the door. “Have a great day,” I called back as I shouldered my way outside, narrowing my eyes against the glare of the sun after being in that dark and miserable place.

## **Sixteen (Emily)**

The door slammed shut again and the library was filled with a silence that somehow seemed just as oppressive as that soldier’s bellowing. I didn’t realise how tense I was for another second or two, until I let out a breath and felt myself deflate. Then, certain enough that Wightman wasn’t coming back, I turned and frowned at Arndt.

“I’m sorry about him,” I said, stepping up to his desk. “He was one of them, the soldiers I caught spying.” Arndt sighed and shook his head, pulling off his glasses.

“This is what I was talking about, Emily. If you go around asking questions, they’ll keep on harassing you like this.”

“I know.” I perched on the spare chair beside his desk and looked him in the eye. “Did you know that Friedrich Klingmann was having an affair with Jenna Lemann?” I asked him. His expression didn’t change.

“I didn’t know that, but it explains why her husband ran off to drink himself into an early grave.”

“And why the Klingmanns were arguing like thunder last night,” I said. “Jenna was sat by herself in the square, just after the fire started. Didn’t you see her when you passed through?”

“Perhaps,” Arndt said with a wave of his hand. “I was tired, I’d stayed here late and all I could think about was going home to a hot bath.” He leaned across the desk on his elbows and raised one eyebrow. “Is this all part of your little investigation? Don’t tell me you think that Jenna started the fire now?” A wry smile crossed his lips and I rolled my eyes.

“Don’t you think she’s crazy enough? If Friedrich spurned her, she might have done it for revenge, maybe a spur of the moment decision.”

“I think she’s a little highly strung, perhaps. And her choice of husbands is questionable. But an arsonist?” He shook his head and began to tidy away the papers on his desk. For a moment I watched him, then I rose and grabbed my scarf from the coat hanger, the only reason I’d come back, before heading for the door.

“I’m going out again,” I called back. “I’ll be back before you close.” He must have known where I was headed, but thankfully he didn’t protest. He just let me go without a word.

## **Seventeen (Adam)**

That endless grey road stretched out in front of us, seeming to lead into nothing but a fine spring mist, but just ten miles ahead was the town of Kungsbrucken. Thankfully the car we’d commandeered had a roof to shield us from the fierce gales that swept across the barren countryside, but we still had to speak up to hear each other over the groans of the engine, which sounded on the verge of self-destruction.

“What if I was wrong about everything?” I said, my voice already hoarse. Shaw glanced across at me, his head still rested on the passenger window.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, not just Turner and Loriatt. What if Jurgen didn’t kill the girl’s grandfather either? What if he really did just happen across the body and took the opportunity to help himself to the larder?”

“Don’t tell me you’re feeling guilty for shooting that bastard,” Shaw replied. “He did Lane in with his own pistol, right in front of you!”

“I know, I know. What I mean is, what are the bloody chances that two people from the same family are murdered in the same day, by different killers?”

“You think one person did them both in?” Shaw asked. I shrugged, my palms itching from the vibrations trembling through the steering wheel.

“Sure. I don’t know why, but if Turner really is innocent...” I shook my head and breathed the warm, moist air that filled the cabin. “Maybe it’s some sick revenge thing, who knows. Jurgen only killed Lane because he was cornered and desperate. We should’ve been more careful, restrained him sooner.”

“I don’t know,” Shaw said, closing his eyes. “You’re starting to sound like a real bloody policeman now. All these theories. It’s making my head hurt.”

“Are you sure that isn’t just last night’s wine?” I grunted, but he didn’t hear me over the car’s roar.

“What are we going to do in Kungsbrucken anyway?” he asked, pronouncing it ‘Kingsbrocken’.

“Well, Turner said he was drinking in some kind of bar the night of the murder. I’ve done a sketch of his face, so I figured we’d show it around all of the bars we can find and see if anyone recognises him. Then maybe we can find out who this mysterious woman he met is.”

“I never knew you were an artist,” Shaw said, lifting his head from the window. “Can I see?”

“The drawing? Well, it’s not exactly art, it’s just a rough sketch.” I took one hand from the wheel and dug into my pocket, pulling out the slip of paper I’d wedged in there earlier. He took it and opened it up, then a wide grin spread across his face. I peered over, biting the tip of my tongue. “What do you think?”

“Why has he got three noses?” Shaw asked. I frowned and squinted at the drawing.

“Those aren’t noses. Those are his cheeks either side.”

“Oh.” He nodded and folded up the piece of paper and slipped it back inside my pocket. “In that case, it’s a wonderful drawing.”

“Alright, shut your mouth,” I said with a scowl. “It’s the best we’ve got.”

The light outside was fading fast, even though it was still early afternoon. In all directions, the sky was concealed by a dense carpet of moody black clouds, while the mist felt like it was closing in all around us. I’d been stuck in trenches during days and nights like this, back in the early years before we pushed into the enemy’s heartland. It wasn’t so bad in the spring and summer, but by the time winter rolled around, you could feel the chill right to the pit of your stomach. It was like your organs were freezing right there inside of you. I used to lie still as a rock as the bombs exploded in the distance, as if moving even a fraction would make my heart, my lungs, every last bit of me shatter into pieces.

I shook the memories as best I could, already feeling an itch that I didn’t dare scratch with Shaw right beside me. Maybe once I’d have trusted him enough to share, but these days I wasn’t really sure how close together we stood. So I’d decided, subconsciously, that I didn’t want anyone but the doc to know about my secret need, even though I had an inkling that Shaw had already figured it out. To distract myself from the cravings, I went back over everything that had happened since we were called to Schmidt’s house; every little detail that might somehow mean something. I still couldn’t see how Turner could be innocent, even if he’d been doped out of his mind when he killed the girl. But while there was even a murmur of doubt, I couldn’t just sit around and wait for them to fill him with bullets.

It was almost a shock when the rickety old sign loomed out of the mist, welcoming us to Kungsbrucken in long-faded Deutsche. Less than a minute later, the road turned from a mud track to stone. I slowed the car and the engine squealed a little less ferociously. Beside me, Shaw stirred from his afternoon slumber, rubbing at his eyes with his fingertips and stifling a yawn.

“Slept off the worst of it?” I asked and he blinked twice, grimacing.

“Still feels like someone sliced through my head with a bayonet,” he muttered, rummaging in his pocket and slipping a fag between his lips.

“Don’t smoke in here,” I warned him. “We’ll be out in a minute, just hang on until then.” He peered sideways at me, the matches already clutched in his right hand, poking through the gap where his fingers should have been.

“Since when do you give a shit?” he asked and I shook my head.

“It’s not me. The Major uses this car and if he smells fag smoke after we return it, he’ll rip my bollocks off and crush ‘em like grapes.”

“Right, fine.” He twirled the match box with his remaining fingers and left the cigarette clinging between his lips.

Before we hit the first buildings, we came to the old German pillbox that stood forlornly at the side of the road, its dark paint peeling off on all sides. It was only just large enough for a human being to cram themselves and a chair inside, and today that poor bugger was some fresh-faced kid with angry red acne all over his chin and cheeks. He looked as wet as they come and he almost dropped his rifle as he rose and stepped outside to greet us. I rolled down the window and gave him a weak smile.

“Carry on through, sir,” he said with a hasty salute, cranking up the wooden barrier that dangled across the road.

“Thanks,” I called out. “By the way, were you on duty out here the night before last?”

“No, sir,” the kid replied, returning to the side of the car and peering in through the window. Shaw ignored him, still flipping the match box. “I only do day shifts,” the kid continued. “Try Captain Pipes up at the barracks, he should know who was at the post.”

I thanked him and rolled through the barriers, cranking up the window again as we cut into town. Kungsbrucken was much like Rottstein, another town that had sprouted on the main Southern road that led into the very heart of Germany, now under full English occupation while the geniuses back home decided what the hell to do with it. I’d only been here once before and hadn’t rushed back again, so I didn’t know any of the officers

occupying the town. I just hoped that they knew Turner, from his occasional shopping visits.

The barracks were your typical dark grey soulless sets of buildings, near the edge of Kungsbrucken. The soldiers on duty waved us through and I parked up near the entrance, just as rain began to spit down across the windshield. Roughly half a second after I pulled on the handbrake, Shaw jumped out of the car, lit up his fag and sucked down the smoke like his life depended on it. He pulled a satisfied face, the smoke gushing out of his nostrils before disappearing on the breeze.

“Better now?” I asked and he stared back at me blankly.

I thought that things had become a little lax back in Rottstein, with rank and order generally breaking down, but here in Kungsbrucken it was a total spectacle. When we pushed into the main recreation hall, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. Some of the squad were sat around the room-length tables drinking and playing cards, but most of the men had gathered in one corner, huddled in a messy circle. They were yelling and cheering and when we pushed our way into the gathering, my jaw actually dropped. In the centre of the huddle, two enormous cockerels were lunging at each other, flapping their wings violently as they tore into the other bird with beak and claw. The men screamed their approval or disgust, clutching fistfuls of paper which they waved emphatically.

“Jesus Christ,” I said, turning to Shaw. A bewildered grin had spread across his face.

“Why didn’t we think of this,” he yelled over the roars of the crowd. “We got chickens back in Rottstein?”

I felt an elbow in my back and when I turned around I saw a man with greasy, swept-back hair gesticulating wildly at the nearest cock, an all-white bird with an abnormally big head. The thing was a miserable sight. One of its wings had been ripped open and was hanging limply now, the white feathers turning a dark crimson. Its rival, a brown bird with speckles across its chest, squawked and lunged with both claws spread wide. The white cock couldn’t dodge in time and it staggered back, its one good wing flapping madly. The brown cock sensed victory was near and thrust its beak



at the other bird, sinking the tip into the white cock's eyeball. I watched, horrified, as the eyeball popped and was scooped clean out.

"No, no, no!" the man with greasy hair screamed at the white bird. "You stupid feathered bastard, what are you doing? Don't retreat, attack! Attack!" A moment later, the brown bird lunged again and it was all over. Feathers flew and blood splattered across the wooden floor and the white cock lay still, a torn and wretched mess. The man with greasy hair grimaced and scrunched up his paper, hurling it at the victor, who skipped away with a crow. "You better run," the man yelled. "I'll bite your bloody head off!"

I was ready to back out of the crazy scene and go find an officer, when I noticed the greasy guy's uniform. At first I couldn't believe it, but unless he'd stolen the clothes he wore, this man was a Captain, the same as me. He must have somehow felt my disbelieving stare because he turned and squinted at me.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked and I had the sudden feeling that this trip had been a massive waste of time.

"Are you really a Captain?" I asked and he smiled.

"Do me a favour," he said, nodding at the dead bird. "Take that sack of bones right there and shove it up your arsehole. Okay, chum?" He slapped me on the arm and pushed his way past me, out of the fray. I watched his back as he strode across the dining room, snatching up a beer from another soldier's grasp and lifting it to his lips. The other soldier turned to protest, then thought better of it and grabbed another glass instead.

"What a prick," I muttered and Shaw chuckled.

"I don't know, I think I like him. Should we go introduce ourselves?"

"What's the point? We'd get more useful info out of the bird." I jabbed a thumb at the defeated cockerel's carcass, which was being swept into a box for disposal.

"Might as well try," Shaw said and he set off before I could protest. I cursed under my breath and, pausing only to let the black cockerel charge past as two men gave chase, I followed my partner to the Captain's side. In the ten seconds it took me to rejoin him, the captain managed to sink his

captured beer. He wiped the froth from his lips with the back of his hand and peered at myself and Shaw with a nonplussed expression.

“What do you two fannies want?” he asked, turning his head slightly to belch. “After my autograph?”

“Well,” I said, “we’ve got no idea who you are, so take a wild guess.” He snorted at that, but before he could throw another insult our way, some lanky idiot wearing just a vest strode over and slapped him on the shoulder.

“Bad luck there,” the idiot said in a cockney accent, handing the Captain a fresh beer. “I thought Percy had him there, ‘til that little stumble.” The captain shook his head.

“That’s three in a row I’ve lost now. It’s enough to drive a man to drink.” He tipped back his glass and I felt the last of my patience drain away.

“Look,” I said, “if you’re all done commiserating, we need to speak with someone in charge. If there actually is someone in charge.” The Captain ignored me, drinking his beer down, but the lanky idiot glared at me.

“Watch your bloody mouth, northern monkey,” he said, taking a step towards me. He was about half a foot taller with rippling muscles in every area, even his neck. I knew that I should just keep my mouth shut, maybe try to find another Captain somewhere in this dump. But my stomach was burning and the words spilled out before I had a chance to stop them.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” I spat at him, my hands balling into fists down at my sides. “Why don’t you bugger off and play with your chickens.”

“I’d rather ram my fist down your throat,” he growled and before I could react, he thrust his palms into my chest and pushed me hard. I stumbled, arms flailing, desperately trying to catch my balance before I dropped to the ground. Luckily some other drunken fool got in my path and I crashed straight into him, which stopped me from staggering backwards. Suddenly everyone in the room seemed to realise what was happening and a roar went up, bodies pressing in around us. Grinning faces surrounded me, the whole room cheering on the lanky idiot.

“Smash his face in, Hally!”

“Come on Hall, pound ‘im good!”

“You’re a corpse,” the idiot, Hall, said as he jabbed a finger at me. Jesus, even his fingers were like thick slabs of meat. A sudden nausea hit hard, but I knew I couldn’t back down, couldn’t look scared. I had no time to think anyway. A second later Hall lunged at me, those meaty hands rising again to grab at my uniform. Survival instinct kicked in and I twisted sideways, sweeping his hands away with my arm before stepping backwards, out of his reach. The crowd roared, their cries for blood cutting right through my skull. Already my heart was thundering and my breath came short, sticking in my throat. Hall came at me again, teeth bared, but this time someone shoved me from behind and I staggered straight into the lumbering meat head’s path. I saw his fist swing towards me but there was nothing I could do. His knuckles drove into my right cheek, crunching against the bone. Everything juddered and a red hot pain flashed through my jaw and down my neck, ending somewhere between my shoulder blades. My body turned into a sack of rocks and the next I knew, I was already on the floor with a piercing ringing in my ears and one of my back teeth resting on my tongue. I could taste blood, not just inside my mouth but also spreading across my lips from where they’d split open. A wet, guttural groan rumbled in my chest.

When I opened my eyes again, I saw Hall standing over me, a smug little grin resting on his face. He said something that I didn’t quite catch, between the ringing noise and the laughter of the arseholes all around us. He started to laugh himself, until an arm suddenly curled around his throat from behind and tightened. Shaw, God bless him, had jumped onto the moron’s back and was squeezing the breath from him with all his might. Hall spun around in a full circle, desperately trying to prise Shaw’s arm away. Ignoring the pain in my jaw, I swung my legs out and wrapped them around Hall’s ankles while he staggered wildly. Immediately he crashed forwards onto his hands and knees and Shaw tumbled over his shoulder, rolling onto his side. Hall gasped, sucking in oxygen and massaging his throat with those meaty fingers, his eyes stretched wide and burning with rage. By the time he got back to his feet, I was already up again. To my left, a soldier clutching a bottle of beer roared at us both, urging each of us to kill the other. I grimaced, snatching the bottle from his hand and turning back to Hall. The lug was already coming at me, but this time I was ready. Instead of stepping away, I pushed towards him and threw a knee straight into his groin. Then, as he reeled backwards, both hands clutching his squashed

tomatoes, I raised the bottle and slammed the base down onto his skull. The bottle shattered apart and glass and beer spattered over Hall's face and rained down onto the floor. I was ready to follow up with a right hook, but I'd already done enough. Hall slumped backwards onto one of the tables, scattering mugs with his flailing limbs before he finally fell still and silent.

"What a prick," Shaw said, dusting himself off beside me. I turned and peered at the crowd, but most of them had lost interest now that their gladiator had fallen and were already turning away, muttering amongst themselves. I clutched one hand to my chest, panting hard. My cheek and jaw still blazed with pain and when I spat my tooth into my palm, a worrying volume of blood came out with it. I stared down at the molar, then I shook the worst of the blood away and slipped it into my pocket.

"That was even more entertaining than the cockfighting," came a voice behind me, and when I turned I saw the Captain grinning back at me. "You must've cracked that bottle over his head pretty bloody hard. Hally's got a thick old skull on him."

"We need some help with an investigation," I told him, my words a little slurred. He raised an eyebrow.

"Investigation? Who are you boys?"

"We're from Rottstein," Shaw said and that seemed to get the moron all excited.

"Heyyy, Rottstein, eh? I heard your townsfolk are dropping like flies and half the town burned down the other night."

"Maybe a slight exaggeration," I replied, running a finger underneath my collar. It felt as if the bloody thing had shrunk and was slowly cutting into my throat. "But you might be able to help us with a murder case."

"Finally," the captain bellowed, "a bit of fucking intrigue! I've been bored off my tits since we smashed the jerries. Here, let me buy you buggers a drink and we'll have a natter." He thrust his near-empty mug into my hands and snatched up two more from the table, then he strode to the end and sat down on the bench. Shaw followed and I did the same after depositing my glass back on the table. "So," the captain said as we sat down

opposite. “First things first, I’m Captain Thomas Geddes. And you chaps are?”

“Captain King,” I replied, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand. “And this is Corporal Shaw.” Geddes threw back some more of the cloudy booze and beamed from ear to ear.

“Alright then, that’s the formalities over. So what’s this investigation, eh?”

“Murder case,” Shaw replied before I could stop him. “Young girl, found dead in the woods.”

“Juicy,” the captain said and he leaned across the table, his eyes flicking between us. “How was she done in? Shot, stabbed?”

“Strangled,” Shaw said with a glint in his eye, but I cut him off before anything else came tumbling from his mouth.

“We need to know if you saw one of my men a couple of nights ago,” I said, tapping the table with a finger. “He came to Kungsbrucken for supplies and we need to retrace his steps.”

“Another soldier?” Geddes frowned. “He’s not the murder suspect, is he?”

“We’re still trying to piece it all together,” I said. “The soldier’s name is Lieutenant James Turner.”

“Doesn’t ring any bells, I’m afraid. What does he look like?”

“Show him your drawing,” Shaw said, nudging my arm. I felt my face start to heat up but I plucked the paper from my pocket and unfurled it on the table, then slid it across the sticky surface. Geddes peered at the drawing and his beaming smile returned.

“Bugger me blue,” he cackled, slapping his palm down on the table. “What’s wrong with his face? Did he headbutt a tank?”

“Look, forget the drawing,” I said, pulling it back and stashing it away in my jacket. “He’s about six foot tall, he has short dark hair parted to the right side and a mole just under his chin.”

“Don’t think I’ve seen your Lieutenant,” Geddes said with a shake of his head. “Sorry, chaps.”

“Well, do you know who was on guard at the pill box that night? We were told to ask a Captain Pipes.”

“No idea I’m afraid.” Geddes grinned and finished off his beer. “As for old Pipesy, you’ll be waiting a while to get anything out of him. He lost a bet, see.” The captain pointed over my shoulder and I turned to see a middle-aged man with a bushy moustache and double chin slumped in the corner of the room with an empty bottle resting between his legs.

“Christ,” Shaw said, “what was the bet?”

“That he could drink a whole bottle of whiskey and not pass out.” Geddes smiled and scratched his chin. “To his credit, he finished off the bottle in record time. It was the staying conscious part where he fluffed his lines.”

“Is there anyone else who might be able to help?” I asked.

“Sure,” Geddes replied. “Captain Hall. But you’ll have to wait for him to wake up and find all his teeth.” He nodded at the man in the vest, who was still slumped across the opposite table.

“Captain,” I said, desperation creeping in. “Look, we really need some help. Turner claims he drank in a bar somewhere in town that night, maybe we could try retracing his steps?”

“Well, that’s easy enough,” Geddes said. “Only two bars in this town. Seems like a good excuse to go visit them both. Follow me, gents.”

We did as he asked, heading north from the barracks into the centre of town. By now the sky was dark for real, the sun setting somewhere beyond the hills, behind that thick layer of cloud. Kungsbrucken was typically silent at this hour. The locals were mostly locked away in their homes and I counted just three other people on the short walk to the central square, one of those being a soldier who was leaning against a wall with a fag in one hand and a plain brown bottle in the other. He was gazing up at the stars with his mouth gaping wide, as if he’d just seen a merry band of naked angels frolicking overhead. Meanwhile, Geddes was teasing as much

information as he could out of Shaw and I decided I was too bloody tired to give a damn. Besides, my face still felt like I'd ran into a brick wall.

The first bar we tried was a cozy little cellar called Das Kapitan, hidden away beneath a row of houses. The staircase leading down into the dingy room was so squat that it must have rattled the brains of many a soused patron. I missed one of the beams by less than an inch, the sharp corner brushing through my hair and breezing over my scalp. From then on I was extra careful, hunching my body and stepping sideways. At the bottom I sucked in a triumphant breath of the sticky, alcoholic air and glanced around, my eyes quickly adjusting to the gloomy interior, which was lit only by a dozen or so thick-bodied candles lining the walls. A handful of patrons filled the scattered tables, mostly sitting alone or in pairs, with a glass of beer or wine clutched close to their chests. The hushed chatter died down as we entered and every head turned towards us.

"Greetings," Geddes said, waving and beaming that gormless grin of his. He led us to the bar at the far end of the room, where a thick-set man was scribbling in an enormous notebook, by the light of one of the candles. He was the only one paying us no attention, not until Geddes slapped down a handful of coins. "Barkeep," the Captain said, "three beers. And my chum here has a couple of questions for you." The bartender glanced up, a mildly aggrieved expression drifting across his leathery face.

"Captain Geddes," he said, his voice so deep and his accent so thick that it came out more as a growl. "You know your money is no good here." He placed a meaty hand on the bar and pushed the pile of coins away. Geddes stared down at the heap, the smile still playing across his lips.

"You mean free drinks all round?" he ventured. The bartender shook his head slowly.

"I mean get out of my bar."

"Oh, come on now, I don't think that's really very sporting. The damages I paid you were more than fair. I bet that shoddy old furniture wasn't even worth half what I gave you."

"And my daughter?" the bartender said, pushing the book aside and leaning across the bar, the wooden frame creaking beneath him. "What is

she worth, exactly?" Now Geddes' smile faltered and he raised his hands, backing off half a step.

"Now, I already told you, I didn't know she was your daughter until after the...unpleasantness."

"Excuse me," I cut in, desperately wishing that we'd tracked down this place alone. The bartender's eyes shifted and his piercing gaze fell on me instead, immediately judging me for sharing the same oxygen as Captain Geddes. I cleared my throat. "My name's Captain King, I'm investigating the murder of a local girl over in Rottstein. I just need to know if a soldier was in here drinking two nights ago."

"We get a lot of English," the bartender said, his glare sliding over to Geddes again. I leaned on the bar, trying my best to edge the other Captain aside.

"His name is Lieutenant James Turner, he's six feet tall..." I gave the full description and his expression remained as solid as stone, so I thought what the hell and I pulled out my drawing and slid it in front of him. The ink shone from the paper by the flickering candlelight.

"Yes, I know that man," the bartender eventually said, I think to everyone's surprise. "But he doesn't look like this." He prodded the paper with a grimace. "What is this, three noses?"

"Forget the drawing," I said, pulling the paper aside and scrunching it up. "You know Lieutenant Turner?" My heart was thumping as the bartender nodded and rubbed his chin with those meaty fingers.

"He comes every week, drinking with his friend."

"Every week?" Shaw said, confusion painting his face. "What friend?"

"Herr Rubbnacher," the bartender replied. "Local butcher."

"Was Lieutenant Turner here with a woman two nights ago?" I asked, my head suddenly bursting with about a dozen different questions. The bartender shrugged.

"No woman. Just Herr Rubbnacher."



*Jesus Christ*, I thought, a warm bead of sweat stroking its way down my brow. *Turner was lying from the start.*

“Did you notice anything a bit strange that night,” I asked.

“Strange?” the bartender said with a curl of his lip. “Nothing more strange than a German man drinking with an English soldier.”

“So where’s this butcher, then?” Shaw asked. “Might have a few questions for him.”

“Well, during the day you can find him in the butcher’s shop.” The cold expression told us everything we needed to know. We’d outstayed our welcome and our witness was keen to return to his accounts. I nudged Shaw beneath the bar and stepped back.

“Thanks for your help,” I said, then I turned and strode back across the bar, hoping to Christ that Shaw and especially Geddes were following. Thankfully they’d picked up on the bartender’s mood just as clearly and they came along, the three of us exiting the cellar without another word.

Back on street level, I paused beneath a lamppost and tried to take in everything we’d just learned. If the bartender was telling the truth, then Turner had lied about two things. First, this wasn’t a one-off trip to a bar as he gathered supplies. This was a regular thing and he apparently returned to the same bar every time. Second, there was no beautiful local lady who seduced him and then possibly drugged him. Just some butcher called Rubbnacher. I thought back to what Jenna Lemann told me in the cells and I wondered if it was true. Just one lead to follow now, one way to know for sure.

“Fat, sweaty bastard,” Geddes crowed, twisting around when we stepped out onto the street and flicking a v-sign back down the staircase. “Beer tastes like piss anyway. Come on, lads, let’s go back to the barracks. Might still be some booze left if we’re lucky.”

“Does Rubbnacher own the butcher’s shop?” I asked him and he frowned back.

“Only been there once, but he was the only bugger in there.”

“Where can we find it?” I asked, this time hoping for directions rather than a guide.

“You’re not going there now, are you? It’ll be closed.” Geddes shook his head and jabbed a thumb back the way we’d come, down towards the barracks. “Booze now, detective rubbish later.”

“Tell you what,” I said, slapping Shaw on the back. “My man here will head back with you and sink a few beers and I’ll go check out the butcher’s. Deal?” Geddes’ face immediately lit up and he nodded enthusiastically. Shaw didn’t look too upset with the offer either.

“Deal,” Geddes said. “Butcher’s is two streets along...no, wait, three streets, over that way. Can’t miss it, all the dangling meat’s a dead give-away. Don’t be long or we’ll drink your share.” He turned to Shaw with a beaming smile. “Come on then, chum, my throat’s drier than a nun’s crotch. Let’s fill our tanks, eh?”

I watched them stomp off down the road, wondering if Shaw would still be coherent or even conscious by the time I returned, then I span on my heels and headed in the direction Geddes had pointed me. I was less than confident at his hazy directions and my concern was well-founded, as I still hadn’t found the bloody butcher’s shop twenty minutes later, despite wandering down almost every little street I came across. Finally, after half an hour had passed, I somehow stumbled across the place. Geddes had pointed me in completely the wrong direction and I wasn’t too sure it was an accident either. Bastard was probably snickering about it with Shaw right now, over a couple of warm beers. I huffed out a breath and peered in through the darkened windows at the joints and cuts that were on display. As expected, it was a pretty pathetic offering. If you joined up the meagre slabs of flesh – a cut of liver, a few slices of bacon, some fatty chops – into one whole animal, it’d maybe just about make up an anorexic cow.

I stepped back and craned my neck, peering up at the first floor of the building. Above the shop, a plain pair of windows glowed. I was counting on the butcher living up there, to save me a return journey the following day. After checking both ways down the street, which was as eerily silent as the rest of the town, I returned to the door and pushed the tiny button built into the frame. From somewhere inside, I heard a shrill buzzing sound.

While I waited for a response, my eyes wandered across the produce again, greedily savouring the salty meats. As fatty and stringy as most of it looked, I'd have happily paid good money for a steak or two. Our meals back at base had been increasingly dire, consisting mostly of cereals and mushy greens. I couldn't remember the last time we'd had bacon, or sausage, or even gravy. The thought of it was enough to make my stomach churn in rage. I just hoped that mum was still getting a good feed back home, despite the rationing. She always complained in her letters, of course, but then my mum would always find something to grieve over. If she was Queen of England, she'd probably argue that the hat was too heavy.

I was so lost in my thoughts that I almost jolted when a pale face appeared before me, peering out through the thick slab of glass. It was a youthful face, belonging to a man perhaps the same age as me, with hair shaved to stubble. His eyes were slits, invisible in the dark. He hovered there for a moment, then he shuffled to his side and I heard the latches being drawn back on the other side of the door. Finally it opened with an ear-gouging creak and the man appeared in the doorway.

"Herr Rubbnacher?" I asked and he sized me up.

"Who are you?" he asked, his suspicion all too obvious. I took it from that response that he was indeed the butcher.

"Captain King. I'm based over in Rottstein, here for an official investigation. I've heard you know a Lieutenant James Turner?" The name won an immediate reaction. Rubbnacher shuffled his feet and for a moment I thought I was about to get the door in my face. Thankfully the butcher merely pursed his lips and leaned against the frame.

"What kind of investigation?" he asked.

"Murder." Again, a reaction. This time, Rubbnacher licked his lips and sucked in a breath.

"James, is he..."

"He's not dead," I told him. "But he's tangled up in something bad and I need to speak with you." He seemed to mull it over, before finally stepping aside and inviting me into the shop.

The ground floor smelled of blood, salt and vinegar, but as I crept up the stairs to the top floor, the stench of raw flesh gave way to a sweeter smell, like summer flowers. At the top of the staircase, there were two doors. One led into a tiny bathroom, complete with a metal tub and sink. I cautiously shuffled through the other door and found myself in a bedroom, which seemed to double as a study with a desk pushed up beside the bed. The place was well lit by a single gas lamp, but glancing around, I couldn't tell where that strange, sweet smell was drifting from. All I could see in the room was furniture. I stepped to the side and watched Rubbnacher intently as he stepped in behind me and strode to the desk. He plucked up a bottle of wine and held it aloft.

"Drink?" he asked me. I shook my head, thinking of the state Turner was in that night.

"Fine, thanks." I waited for him to pour himself a glass and take a sip, then I started with the questions. "So, I guess the first thing is, how do you know Lieutenant Turner?"

"I met him soon after you English kicked the Nazis out," the butcher replied. He took a longer sip and leaned against the desk, which groaned in dismay. Now I could see that he was skinnier than I first thought, but his biceps were unusually thick. I figured that was from hauling and cutting up carcasses. His eyes were still narrowed to slits and they remained locked on me, even when he tipped his head back to drink.

"How did you meet?" I asked. Rubbnacher blinked, swirling the wine in the glass.

"In a bar called Das Kapitan. He was there, drinking by himself. I too was drinking alone. We caught each other's eye and decided to start a conversation."

"The bartender there told me you used to meet up regularly," I said. Not a question, of course, I just wanted to see what his response would be. At first he was silent, those dark little eyes cutting into me, making me feel rotten to the core. Then he finished his glass and slid it back across the table.

"Please," he said, "what is this investigation? Why are you asking me about one of your own Lieutenants?" There was a chilly edge to his tone

and I was relatively certain that I'd get nothing else out of him, not without explaining a little first. I shifted my hands to my sides, making sure that my revolver was readily accessible, the holster catch peeled back. If the butcher moved, I wanted the gun out in less than a second.

"We found a girl, murdered, on the outskirts of Rottstein. Turner is the main suspect." His surprise at the news at least seemed genuine, his suspicion melting into obvious disbelief.

"Why do you think it was him?" Rubbnacher asked. I decided to hit him with the full grisly details.

"The girl was murdered two nights ago," I told him, "around the same time Turner was driving back into town. His memory's a little hazy, but the evidence is pretty solid. He picked up the girl somewhere, took her to the woods, raped her and strangled her." The butcher's brow creased and his left eyelid twitched.

"If you're so sure it was him," he asked, "why are you here, talking with me?"

"Lieutenant Turner is going to be executed. Before that happens, I'd rather know exactly what went on that night."

"I see," Rubbnacher said, shifting his weight from one buttock to the other and crossing his arms. "So then you can shoot him in good conscience." He sighed and bowed his head, the first time his gaze had dropped since we entered the room. "Well, I can tell you, I don't think James is the man you're after."

"Why not?" I demanded and he snorted.

"Do I have to make it so obvious?" His head lifted again and I saw a bitter smile twisting his lips. "You say the murderer raped this girl. I say, James would not have it in him to rape a girl."

"You two..." I started to say, then I trailed off. The butcher nodded.

"Yes, us two. I was with him that night. We drank, a lot. We took some stronger stuff. At just before midnight, he drove back to Rottstein. I told him to stay, but he wouldn't listen. How he even managed to make it back,

I'll never know. It's a good thing the road is just one straight line."  
Rubbnacher shook his head. "That is all I can tell you."

"Aye," I said. "If it comes to it, would you be willing to repeat that in a martial hearing?"

"No," the butcher replied. I frowned.

"No?"

"No, for the same reason James didn't tell you what he was really doing the night of the murder." Rubbnacher pushed himself away from the desk and stepped closer, that piercing glare burning into me once more. "Do you know what the Nazis did to a local boy when they found out he preferred men to girls? They took him to the square and they bound his hands and feet, then they cut the clothes from his body so he was naked. Then they set four hungry dogs on him. By the time they were done eating, he was just bones and blood." The butcher turned his head and spat and I flinched.

"We're not the Nazis," I said, my voice wavering. He just smiled, a sad little smile.

"Someone else killed your girl," he told me. I nodded back, then I brushed off my uniform with both hands before thanking him and descending once more into the stench of blood.

Shaw was on stage two of drinking when I pulled him from the barracks and back into the car. Still conscious, still vaguely coherent, but all too eager to continue and a little light of foot. He slumped against the window and lifted a stolen bottle to his lips while I teased the engine into life and pulled away, swinging back in the direction of Rottstein. This time I waved to the pillbox boy without rolling down the window and he obligingly lifted the barrier and saluted as we passed.

"So you found the butcher," Shaw mumbled, swinging the bottle between his fingers. I nodded slowly, eyes fixed on the yellow track ahead, quickly disappearing into darkness. "Worth the trip?"

"Well, I'm none the wiser, but that's two people, two locals no less, who say he can't have done it."

“So what do we do now?” Shaw asked. I’d been wondering the same thing and I was no closer to an answer.

“We need to start again,” I told him. “Right at the beginning, with Schmidt. If Turner really is innocent, maybe Jurgen was too. Maybe I’m making one big fucking hash of this whole thing.” I exhaled slowly, realising how tense I was; my spine was so rigid it had already begun to ache and I tried to ease back into the seat and relax a little. It was useless. My mouth and throat were dry and my skin tingled and I needed one of my pills right now. Jesus, was this the third today, or the fourth? I never usually lost count like this. My mind crashed back through everything that had happened since I woke up in those damp sheets, but just thinking about it made my stomach buzz so I decided to hell with it. Shaw was too busy drinking and staring out at the endless black countryside, so I eased the tiny plastic case out of my pocket with one hand and thumbed the lid back, tipping one of the magic pills onto my tongue. Shaw turned to me just as the case dropped back inside my pocket and that glorious little pill slipped down my throat.

“Oh well,” Shaw said. “Fun bunch, the Kungsbrucken lot. Captain Geddes said we’re welcome any time.”

“He seemed a little desperate for company,” I replied. Shaw shook his head.

“He’s a good guy.”

“Well, he can certainly drink,” I said. Shaw glanced down at the bottle clutched in his hands and his eyes misted over.

“You think I pound the booze a little too hard, don’t you.” Suddenly he was quiet and sorrowful, like a child who’s just been scolded. I glanced across at him and opened my mouth to reply, but then I paused and thought of the pill dissolving in my stomach and the sheet of sweat coating my forehead.

“I think that the world’s a terrifying place,” I told him. “Life is fragile and fucking meaningless and us....humans...we never should’ve existed, not like this. Animals make it through each day because they don’t think, they just do. They eat, they shit, they sleep. Job done. But us, we have to lie

awake at night, contemplating all the shite we've seen, all the shite we've done. You think a lion gets all stressed over the things it's killed? You think it tosses and turns because it ripped out a tiger's throat? No, course not. So sod it, have a drink. Whatever it takes to drown out those voices." I swallowed and cleared my throat, realising that I was gripping the steering wheel almost tight enough to snap it in two. For a little while, an awkward silence hung between us. Then Shaw turned to me and smiled.

"Lions don't eat tigers," he said. "They live in different continents."

"Fine, then. Wildebeest, or whatever else you bloody find in Africa."

"Mmm." Shaw raised the bottle and peered through the dark glass at the liquid sloshing inside. "The funny thing is, it's not the killing that makes me so bloody depressed. It's the thought of her back home." He gulped back some more and smacked his lips. "I just know I've lost her."

"You're just paranoid," I said, my tone soft. "She'll be waiting for you when you get home, same as always."

"No, I..." He trailed off and sighed, taking another long sip. "I was a shit to her before I left. Said some things I shouldn't have. I don't even know why I did it, it's like I wanted her to move on. To not grieve if I ended up scattered around Germany." I pretended not to notice the tear that escaped and slipped down his cheek, even though he let it linger there, nestled in the grains of stubble. "She's all I've got, back home. There's nothing else there for me. Might as well just spend the rest of my days stuck in this never-ending hell, drinking until my liver explodes."

"Last I heard, there's going to be war trials in Berlin," I said. "Sounds like we might be here a while."

"Let's hope the booze doesn't dry up, then."

For the rest of the journey we stuck to snippets of small talk and before long I spotted the first signs that we were approaching Rottstein. First, the farm across on the right side, just a silhouette by the pale moonlight. Then, a little further on, just before we reached the woods, the ruins of an old house that the Nazis had taken over to use as a guard post. Our tanks had all but blasted it in half when we rolled in two months ago, taking them by surprise. The one remaining window on the top floor was glowing, a candle



burning just behind it on the sill. It had to be the girl, Katherine. She had nowhere else to go, so with the Nazis finally gone, she'd returned to her family home. Or rather, the shattered remains of her family home. I stared up at the window as we drove past, until the treetops obscured it and the darkness surrounded us again.

I dropped Shaw off by the lake and said I would return the car, but I changed my mind after pulling away and turned the thing around instead. Driving back through the woods alone was admittedly a little creepy. A slight understatement perhaps, given the speed I tore down the road, hunched over in my seat, afraid to blink in case Lorient's pale, terrified face suddenly appeared in my windscreen and screamed out for help. Fingers wrapped around her throat, pushing into her soft flesh and choking the life from her. Something was wrong, I could tell before I was even halfway through those cursed, miserable woods. My heart was pummeling my ribcage again and I swore I could hear the blood roaring through my ears, swirling deep inside my brain. But I'd taken my pill just half a bloody hour ago. All the fear and the loathing, it should all be comfortably numb by now. The further I went, the worse it became, until finally when the car burst out of the other side, I was panting and sweating like I was charging the other way, rifle in hand, prepared to kill or die to take the town as our own.

I slammed on the brakes and the car's back end screeched and swung to the side, spinning me around sickeningly fast. The force of it crushed me against the door. My shoulder jarred against the glass and I cried out in pain, still clutching the wheel, and when the car finally lurched to a standstill, I was facing the woods again. The headlights cut in through the trees and suddenly every glowing leaf was a face staring back, the face of every man I'd killed.

"No," I muttered, closing my eyes and fumbling for the keys. The engine cut off and when my eyelids flickered open again the faces were gone, lost to the darkness. "Stay there, you bastards, stay right in there!"

I breathed deep and released a dozen times over, until my body fell limp and I felt the worse of it fading away. Slowly I shifted my hand to the door release, my fingers still trembling slightly. I started to push the door open, but I only managed around five inches before something heavy collapsed

against the other side and forced it shut again, pushing me away. In terror I cried out again, raising my hands to protect myself in case the thing came bursting through the window, but then it let out an almighty bark and I collapsed with relief.

“Sweet baby Jesus,” I breathed. Already Katherine was calling her mutt, ordering him back to the house. The shape dropped from the window and Katz silently and obediently padded away. I climbed out and slammed the door, the noise cutting sharply through the still and silent night, then I shuffled across to the house. My legs were itching, maybe tingling a little from the drive, but my spine had come off worse, most likely a symptom of my awful posture. I dug my knuckles into my lower back, massaging out the cramp until I was stood in front of Katherine. The girl and her mutt stared back at me, eyes shining.

“It’s you,” she said, her voice soft. Beside her, Katz began to pant, his enormous tongue rolling out from between those razor teeth.

“It’s me,” I said, noticing that she had something clutched in her right hand. From here, it kind of looked like a gun. “Just came by to check you’re okay.”

“I’m fine,” she murmured, swinging the thing back and forth. Definitely a gun, no mistaking it now. “What happened to your face?”

“Oh, right.” I tenderly touched my fingertips to my cheek and felt that it was a little swollen. “Just a little disagreement, that’s all. Does it look bad?”

“It looks like you’ve got a lemon in your mouth,” she said. I couldn’t help but smile, even though it hurt. I thought that children were supposed to be less honest when they hit their teens. Shows how much I knew on the matter.

“Where did you get that?” I asked and she brought the little pistol up and rested it in her left palm. The thing was a Mauser HSc, I could make out that much in the dim light thanks to the sloping body from the trigger to the muzzle.

“Found it,” she replied.

“Mind if I check it out?” I held out my hand and she peered up at me. Katz’s tongue shot back into his mouth and he watched me close, his ears pressed back. Eventually Katherine reached out and handed me the gun and that seemed to please the dog, who got on with chewing his own leg instead. “I’ll need some light. Alright if we go inside?”

Katherine led me into the remains of the house and I felt my guts squeeze tight at the state of the place. The porch was still reasonably intact, leading to a staircase which dropped into the ground as well as rising up to the first floor, but two of the rooms here on ground level were little more than rubble. I was almost certain that I’d collapse straight through the stairs as I followed the girl up, but somehow I made it to the top. There I stood for a moment, staring through a doorway that led to a massive crater. What was once presumably a bedroom was now just a few floorboards poking out into space and a clear view of the neighbouring farm.

“That used to be my parents’ room,” Katherine said with a sad little frown. “Come on, my room’s this way.” I started to follow her down the hallway and Katz scampered past, rejoining Katherine’s side before shooting me a cautious look. *Watch yourself, chap, this is my domain.* I kept my distance and let him go first before stepping inside the final room. This one had survived the shelling, with just a cracked ceiling and some loose plaster to show for the onslaught. That single candle on the window sill was the sole source of light, its flickering orange flame reflecting back off the glass. Katherine slumped down on her bed, a tangle of old blankets and pillows, then she pulled her legs up to her chest and watched me.

“What do you think?” she asked. I nodded back.

“I’m surprised it’s still standing, but it’s cozy enough.”

“I mean the gun,” she said. I’d almost forgot that the thing was pressed to my palm. I slowly crossed to the candle and held the Mauser near the flame, then I popped the top of the barrel using the trigger guard notch and inspected the innards. Katherine pushed up to the edge of the bed and watched intently.

“The slide’s a little worn,” I said, showing her the edging. “Spring’s seen better days too. Guessing this gun saw a lot of use. Might be okay, but it might jam. Hard to say unless we test it out. You fired it before?”

“Never,” she said, shaking her head. “Are there bullets inside?”

“Aye, full round.” I slotted it all back together again then pointed to a switch on the side. “This here’s the safety. Only flick that back if you’re sure you have to fire, you don’t want it going off by accident and taking one of Katz’s ears off. Then just pull the trigger.” Suddenly I wondered if I should really be teaching her this, but I figured she’d get around to trying it soon anyway. Better that I explain it all so she knows what to do, rather than her playing around until it blasted a hole in her or one of her friends. She took the gun back with thanks and turned it over in her hands.

“My dad used to have a gun, bigger than this one,” she said, placing the Mauser on the windowsill. “If they’d come for him and mother while I was there, I would have gone to his room and taken the gun and used it on the soldiers.” Katherine sniffed and stared at the candle, her eyes glowing orange.

“They’d have killed you,” I said. She sniffed again.

“Maybe. Maybe I would have killed them.” I was surprised to feel a smile stretch my lips.

“You’re a brave wee lass. I don’t know how you manage to hold it together.”

“Hold it together?” she said, brow furrowed. “Hold what together?”

“Yourself. I don’t mean literally, it’s just an expression. I mean, I don’t know how you cope, after everything that’s happened.” She tilted her head to one side and sucked on her cheek.

“Well, how do you hold it together?” she asked. I touched a hand to my jacket without even thinking about it, feeling the bottle resting in there.

“I need some help,” I said, dropping my gaze. “Sometimes...often, I feel like I’ve got the weight of everyone I killed pressing down on me. Like they’re wrapped around my neck or something.” I shook my head and snorted. “God, I sound daft.” But Katherine, bless her, she nodded along.

“Herr Schmidt used to say the same thing to me. He killed a lot of people in the last war, before I was born. About twenty, he told me. Those are just the ones he remembered too. He said he felt them every day, following him

around, everywhere he went. He couldn't see them, but he knew they were there." She suddenly broke into a smile and leaned in a little. "I wonder if they watched him when he went to the toilet."

"Can you imagine," I said. "That would be a pretty miserable afterlife, following people to the toilet."

"I don't know how they'd all fit in there anyway." She giggled and rolled her eyes, then she stared at me with this intense concentration that made my stomach squeeze tight. "They probably don't mean to make you sad, the ghosts. I think they're just there because they don't want to be forgotten. There's nothing worse than being forgotten."

"Nothing at all?" I asked.

"Nothing. Then it's like you were never really here."

"This is all a little deep from someone so young," I told her. She leaned back and stared down at Katz, who peered back at her with one eye as he lay curled up.

"I've got lots of time to think about things," she said, in a sad little voice. Then she raised a hand to her mouth and stifled a yawn.

"I better get back to the barracks," I said, realising how late it must be. "Just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"You can stay here if you like," the girl said and I smiled again.

"Not sure Katz would like that."

"He's okay, he knows I like you." I stared at the mutt, who had curled up at the foot of her bed. He was still awake, his big, black eyes still fixed on me.

"Well, alright, if you're sure."

Katherine gave me a pillow and a blanket and I set myself up at the other side of the room, making sure that Katz was happy before I bedded down. The last thing I needed right now was having my throat torn out by a jealous dog. The candle was snuffed out and the room fell dark, leaving me alone with just my thoughts. Usually this was my most dreaded part of the day, but tonight was different. Even though my face still throbbed and

ached, I felt my eyelids squeeze shut on their own accord and then I drifted away, into the familiar lingering dreams of bloodshed. Only this time, it wasn't me doing the killing. It was a shadow, rising out of an endless mist to drag terrified souls into the waiting abyss.

## **Eighteen (Katherine)**

When I woke the next morning, he was already gone. Katz was gone too, but that was normal; Katz always scampers off just after the sun rises. That's the best time to chase squirrels because they're still a little dozy. I picked up the blanket and pillow from the floor and threw them back on my bed, then I slipped on my foraging dress (it had a big pocket sewn into the front) and set off to the woods to find some breakfast.

There was no sign of Katz dashing amongst the trees, so I grabbed as many berries as I could fit in my pocket and ate them while I walked the road into town. I was just coming up to the lake when I noticed someone lurking at the edge of the woods. It was the red jumper that gave him away; I caught flashes of it as he stepped between the trees. I already knew who it was and I was reluctant to go over at first, but for some reason I ended up trudging across anyway, already practicing my best sullen expression. I guess I wanted to see if he was sorry at all for the way he'd carried on.

"Hi," I said when I was close enough and Pieter turned and stared at me with huge eyes. He had a thin branch clutched in one hand and his little pocket knife in the other.

"Shit," he muttered, "why did you creep up on me like that?"

"I didn't. You just weren't paying any attention, that's all."

"I'm looking to make some new arrows," he said, stripping the branch with the knife and dropping it into a sack by his feet. He slipped the knife back into his pocket and then picked up the sack and smiled at me. "You want to help me practice some more today?"

“Not likely,” I replied, folding my arms. Instead of apologising, Pieter just rolled his eyes.

“You’re not still mad, are you? Stop being such a girl.”

“I’m not being a girl,” I shot back. I had to resist really hard to keep from picking up a lump of moss and hurling it at his face. He just smiled again and tossed the sack over his shoulder.

“If you come help me make arrows,” he said, “I’ll let you have some of the stew my father made. It’s rabbit stew. I caught the rabbit myself, shot it right through the back leg. Had to finish it off with my knife. He was trying to drag himself away with his front paws, it was hilarious.” I frowned, not really seeing how that could be funny. I’d been forced to do the same with a few small animals that Katz actually managed to catch. He usually bit them once and then left them alone, half alive still but completely ruined. The kindest thing to do was stamp on their heads. I didn’t really feel like making more arrows for Pieter to maim creatures with, but my belly was rumbling with nothing inside but the two handfuls of berries that I’d eaten. The thought of rabbit stew was just too good to turn down.

The walk to his house was quick enough. Pieter and his father lived in one of the biggest houses in the whole town, just at the other side of the lake. We cut along the bank between the woods and the water and reached it in ten minutes, and he quickly ushered me inside. I’d barely even stepped through the door when he slapped an old craft knife into my hand and together we set to work in his kitchen, whittling the branches until they were perfectly smooth. When that was done, Pieter notched the ends and fitted the feathers, before sliding the spiked tips onto the opposite side. A little glue to hold them together and we were done. In all we made a dozen of the arrows, enough to fill the sling that Pieter had made to go over his shoulder. He slipped it on and stood in front of the mirror in the hallway, holding up the bow and admiring himself.

“Looks good, right? I bet if I had this out in the street, even the English would shit themselves.”

“Mmm,” I said, imagining Pieter with his stupid bow and arrow and Captain Adam King with his gun, facing off in the road. I was fairly sure I knew who would actually shit themselves then. And Pieter almost did shit

himself when we heard the sound of a key rattling around in the front door lock a moment later. I glanced over my shoulder and saw a hunched silhouette through the glass in the door. His father was home from the library for lunch.

“Shit,” Pieter hissed, ripping the sling off and pushing it into my arms, along with the bow. I almost dropped the craft knife in surprise, but I managed to slip it away before the whole lot tumbled out of my grasp and I earned myself another whack, to be paid in full when Pieter had the chance. “Quick, take them away,” he grunted, “upstairs!” He shoved me towards the staircase and I almost fell, tripping over my own feet. I managed to correct myself and bounded up the stairs two at a time, seething and screaming insults inside my head. I had no idea why he was so scared of his father seeing the bow and arrow. After all, just how did he think that Pieter caught that rabbit? With his bare hands? Part of me wanted to just stop what I was doing and go back downstairs and show the thing to his father. But then I’d made a promise, with twenty hits as punishment if I went back on my word. So I kept on going, treading lightly when I hit the top. Already Pieter was greeting his father in the hallway below, acting as if I wasn’t here. Maybe he wasn’t allowed to bring anyone into the house, another reason for all of the secrecy.

I’d never been up here before – actually, this was only my second time inside Pieter’s house – so I crept to the first doorway and peered inside. This was Pieter’s bedroom, or so I assumed. There was only a small bed tucked away in the corner and his old football, with the ragged skin, was sat beside the wardrobe. I slipped inside and closed the door behind me.

For a while I sat there on his bed, with the bow and arrow safely stashed away in a corner. There was no sign of Pieter and I knew for sure that him and his father were finishing off that rabbit stew that they’d promised me. My belly was rumbling worse than ever at the thought and I had to finish the last of my berries, but that did nothing to stop the hunger. So, to keep my mind from it, I started to look around Pieter’s room. The place was bigger than my own bedroom and he’d filled almost every flat surface with dozens of little wooden carvings he’d done, mostly tiny men clutching guns or other weapons. I peered at a few of them arranged on top of his dresser, stuck in ridiculous poses with their faces turned up and their knives and rifles poking at the ceiling. He had done a good job, but I couldn’t see the



point. They were too fragile to play with and I got bored of just looking at them after a few seconds.

I turned away and slumped across to the other side of the room and that's where I froze, my eyes fixed on another set of wooden figures on a table in the corner. These figures were different. They weren't soldiers, they were just normal people, staring at me with their tiny pin prick eyes. I knelt beside the table and examined them closely. Each one was different – there were men and women, adults and children, some fat, some thin, some tall, some short. They had different clothes too, painted on with a fine brush. I spotted a pair at the back that looked just like Frau and Herr Lemann. The man was even wearing the same ridiculous hat as Herr Lemann, the one that was always tilted to the side. That made me smile, until I spotted another figure that reminded me of a boy called Otto who lived up in the North end of town. The figure's clothes were identical, the same shorts and shirt that Otto always wore, and he even had the same ruffled blonde hair.

My eyes rolled over the wooden people, picking out even more that I recognised, until finally I found what I was looking for. A girl wearing one of my favourite dresses, the one with the daisies that was now torn at the shoulder. I carefully turned the little wooden girl over in my hand, a frown fixed on my lips.

"How strange," I whispered. It looked like he'd carved figures for almost half of the town and there were even some others lying in a box at the back. I replaced the tiny me and then I leaned a little closer and squinted at the unlucky ones all piled up in the box. A couple of them I didn't recognise, but then I spotted an old man resting on top who looked just like Herr Schmidt, with his little round glasses and tiny tuft of white hair at the front of his skull. I remembered the last time I'd seen that tuft; painted red by his own blood and stuck to one of his kitchen tiles. Beside him was another old man I knew, Herr Reichstig, who had been taken away by the Nazis for conspiring to commit crimes, or at least that was the excuse they used. He'd never been seen again. My heart was pounding by now and I gripped the box and rummaged through with my fingers, searching for two more.

I found them right at the bottom, lying side by side. My mother was wearing a green dress with a black belt, her long, curly black hair draped back over her shoulders, while my father had his suit on, the same suit he

wore every day for work. Carefully I pulled them free and arranged them in my palm, so they were staring up at me with those blank faces. My eyes were stinging and my bottom lip curled and I felt a trickle of wetness run down my cheek, before splashing through my fingers.

A sudden banging noise from downstairs like a door slam made me jolt. Both of the figures tumbled from my palm and hurtled to the ground and I held my breath as they hit the floorboards and bounced in different directions, expecting the tiny wooden limbs to crack apart. Quickly I dropped to my knees and snatched up my mother, noting with relief that she was unharmed, then I turned and squinted under Pieter's bed, where I thought father's little statue had come to rest. Sure enough, there he was tucked into the corner, hiding behind some dust balls. I hunched down and reached for him, my head twisted sideways and my cheek pressed to the ground. Through a trembling in the floorboards, I was sure I could hear someone climbing the staircase. If it was Pieter, and if he found me touching his things, he'd pummel me for sure. I grimaced and stretched out my fingers, fumbling the figure and pushing him further into the dust. Desperate, I forced myself up against the bed so my shoulder was wedged in the gap, then I tried again, this time taking more care. That was when I noticed the scarf, stuffed under the mattress just in front of my face. For a moment, I forgot everything. All I could do was stare at that scarf and the loose threads dangling from its edges, like thick strands of spaghetti pasta. I knew that scarf. It belonged to Loretta, the woman we'd found murdered in the woods.

My hand shifted from the dust and grabbed the scarf instead, pulling it free. When I eased it out from under the bed, the end unravelled and two things fell out. The first was another wooden figure, this one a girl with golden hair. The second was what looked like a hair clipping, kept together with a rubber band. I stared dumbly at them. Some panicked little voice inside my head told me to stand up and walk to the door and go downstairs and leave the house, but I was already too late. The bedroom door was opening behind me and I could feel him standing there, watching me. He saw what I'd done. He knew that I knew.

"Hey," Pieter hissed, crossing the room in three strides and grabbing me by the arm. He tugged me aside and I fell backwards, tensing up as I hit the ground. Now he was stood over me, his eyes big and bright like a wild

animal's. His gaze went from me to the scarf and then back again, over and over. He was breathing hard, his chest heaving as if he was having a fit. "What are you doing," he said, crouching to snatch up the scarf. He tucked the hair and the figure back inside, then he wrapped the scarf around itself and held it in his fist. "Why were you looking under my bed?"

"I'm sorry," I said, still not believing what I'd just seen. "I dropped something down there and I saw Lorient's scarf, and I didn't know what it was so I pulled it out." I was talking without even thinking about it, the words just falling out of my mouth. It wasn't until the words were already out that I realised, I shouldn't have called it Lorient's scarf. I should've pretended I had no idea, maybe even pretended I hadn't seen the hair. Just acted like normal. It probably wouldn't have worked; I was trembling by now and my horror must have been all too obvious. But maybe I could have convinced him just long enough to get out of the house and disappear into the night. Pieter just kept staring at me, his mouth hanging open like he'd forgotten what he was about to say, but his fists were shaking now. I knew if I tried to stand up and run, he would just knock me back down again. So I stayed where I was, peering up at him. "Why do you have it?" I asked, my voice breaking up a little.

"She gave it to me," he said. "It was a present." The lie was obvious, but I was too scared to argue back.

"A present?"

"She loved me," Pieter said. "She loved me, so she gave me that. We were going together, in secret. I used to go around to her place and we'd fuck like dogs and no one else knew!" His voice was rising with every word until he was practically bellowing and I dug my fingernails into the floorboards and crushed my teeth together. I prayed that his father heard him yelling and came up to see what was happening, but there was no sound from downstairs and I realised that his father was probably out in the garden, tending to his crops. That was why I heard the door slam. That was why Pieter was shouting, why he wasn't afraid of being caught.

"What happened to her?" I asked and Pieter shook his head furiously.

"Are you stupid? The English killed her! They're the devil, they ruin everything!" Now his eyes were flipping back and forth again, but I was

distracted by the lump resting against my belly. Suddenly I remembered. I'd dropped the craft knife in the pocket there when Pieter tossed the bow and sling of arrows into my arms. The thing was pathetic, just two inches long, but it was sharp enough to slice through wood. Just knowing it was there made the tremble in my voice disappear.

"What are you going to do?" I asked. He was still panting, his face turning bright red. I'd seen him angry before but I'd never seen him like this.

"I don't know," he muttered, then he reached into his hip pocket and brought out his pocket knife. With his thumbnail, he pulled the blade out. Then he just let it dangle at his side, while he peered down at me. I watched the knife sway just in front of me, my stomach crunching up.

"I won't tell anyone," I said, "about you and Lorient. Just like I didn't tell anyone about the bow and arrow. Twenty punches, right? Twenty punches if I tell?"

"Twenty," he replied, but his eyes had glazed over and he looked like he was in a trance, swaying slightly side to side. I wondered if this was my chance to get to my feet, but then he focused on me again and a strange look crossed his face. His free hand shot out and grabbed my hair before I could react and I cried out, my scalp burning as he tugged me to the side. I stumbled and flailed my arm, my fingers slapping the corner bed post. I couldn't hold on, collapsing onto my hip and scratching my nails across the floorboards, desperately trying to right myself. Suddenly I pictured his knife against my throat, the blade cutting into my skin and muscle, opening up my windpipe. This was it. I had to do something right now, or I'd be his next victim. I fought back the panic and I fumbled my left hand into my pocket, curling my fist around the handle of the craft knife. My thumb pricked against the edge of the blade, peeling back the skin on the tip, but I barely even felt the flash of pain or the hot blood squeezing out across my fingers. Pieter jerked my head back so I was staring up at him and our eyes met, just a second before I swung the knife into his leg as hard as I could. I felt the blade sink in and saw his face stretch with the shock of it. He blinked twice and then his fingers opened and I fell away, pushing myself backwards.

“Bitch,” he screamed, collapsing back against the table filled with the tiny figures. I saw the handle of the craft knife jutting out just below his knee and the little wooden people tumbling to the ground, but by the time the figures hit the floorboards and scattered everywhere I was already scrabbling to my feet, aiming myself towards the door. Pieter was still hissing and spitting like an angry cat when I tore out of that room and ran to the staircase, taking two steps at a time. My chest was heaving, but somehow I still felt out of breath.

I was halfway down when my heel bounced off the corner of one of the steps and my leg jerked to the side and everything inside of me lurched. I didn't even realise what had happened until I was already crashing down the staircase, tumbling over and over so I couldn't even tell which way was up. It felt as if I was surrounded by people punching and kicking me, over and over. Somehow I don't think I cried out, even when my shoulder slammed into the edge of a step and my entire arm went sickeningly numb. My head bounced off the final step, turning everything dark, and then finally it was over.

My vision came back slowly and at first everything was grey, but I was still awake enough to remember what was happening. I moaned, wriggling my aching limbs until I was back on my belly, then I pushed up onto my knees. A spot above my right temple throbbed viciously and my shoulder was racked with pain now, but I tried not to think about it. I could hear Pieter stomping down the stairs so I knew he was close, even though he sounded so distant. I had to get out, right now. With all my might, I slumped against the wall and forced myself up onto my feet. I thought right then that I was going to be sick, but I swallowed hard instead, over and over. Pieter was limping down the steps to my right, one hand clutched to his leg and the other steadying himself on the bannisters. He was yelling at me, screaming that he was going to kill me, but his words were muffled, like he was shouting up at me from the bottom of a lake. I turned away, pushing myself down the hallway. Had to get out. Had to go find Captain Adam King. Why was walking suddenly so hard? I couldn't keep my balance, not even long enough to move in a straight line. Immediately I crashed into a table, knocking some old vase to the ground where it shattered apart with a muted crash. My shoe crunched one of the pieces into dust and I kept on going, but when I glanced up again, Pieter's father, Arndt, was stood just in

front of me, a horrified look on his face. I stopped still, breathing and shaking hard.

“Help,” I muttered, struggling to keep my eyes open. “Pieter’s gone crazy. I need to go.”

“What in the name...” Arndt said, staring down at the shattered vase and then back up at me again. I tried to push around him, but he caught my arm and steadied me. “What’s going on?”

“She knows!” Pieter yelled from somewhere behind me. “She knows everything!”

“I don’t...” I started to say, then my legs gave way and I dropped to the ground, sitting there with my chin resting on my chest. I heard Pieter and his father talking, then everything turned black again and the pain was gone.

## **Nineteen (Terry)**

When King finally showed his face at the cells that morning, I was actually glad to see him, mostly because it meant the Major could give *him* an almighty arse ramming instead of me. He had his usual squinty look, like he was thinking really hard about something that was just beyond his grasp. No sign of Shaw, of course. He was probably sleeping off his hangover in a fucking ditch.

“Where did you get to?” I asked, pushing myself out of the knackered old chair. He glanced down the row of cells and sighed.

“Kungsbrucken. Tracing Turner’s movements the night of the murder.” He turned back to me and I noticed a nice little bruise under his eye, like someone socked him good.

“Hohhhh,” I said, “what happened there? You and Shaw have a tiff?” For a moment he seemed kind of dazed, then he touched his cheek with two

fingers.

“No, I just...walked into a tree or something,” was his reply. He stared at me in a strange way and shook his head. “Look, I don’t think he did it. I don’t think he killed her.”

“What are you on about?” I asked, scratching my temple.

“It just doesn’t make any sense. Turner didn’t even know Loriett, why would he murder her? He was out of his head, but he’s not a killer.”

“But he confessed,” I said and he shook his head again.

“He didn’t confess, he just thinks he saw her. He doesn’t know what the hell happened. It could’ve been a bloody hallucination for all we know.”

“Well, it doesn’t really matter anymore,” I told him. “You missed all the fun. While you were swanning off yesterday doing your investigations, the Major swung by and gave me a royal bollocking. He wanted to know why Turner hadn’t been ‘dealt with’. His exact words. He was fucking furious.”

“I just need more time,” King said, turning and striding up to the first cell. When he saw that it was empty now, he froze and his squint came back. “Jesus Christ, where is he? Where’s Turner?”

“Like I was saying, it’s been dealt with. The Major had him taken out and shot at dawn.”

I folded my arms and watched his expression roll through pretty much every emotion, starting with disbelief and ending somewhere between fury and misery. He grabbed the bars with both hands and pushed his face between them, his eyes crushed shut.

“Why didn’t you stop him,” he whispered. “Why didn’t you do something?”

“What the fuck was I supposed to do?” I shot back, grinding my teeth. “Tell the stuffy old prick to do one?”

“Stall him, tell him we were chasing up leads, anything!”

“How the fuck was I supposed to know you were ‘chasing up leads’, you didn’t tell me a fucking thing before you buggered off!”

“Christ,” King snarled, pushing away from the bars and sticking his nose up to mine. I actually thought the bastard was going to lay his hands on me, maybe even swing for me, but he just blasted hot air and spit into my face instead. “He could have been innocent! We might have just shot an innocent bloody man! One of our own, for god’s sakes!”

“Listen to yourself,” I said, “you’re fucking mental. Been popping too many of those pills, mate.” The mention of his meds seemed to douse that fire in his belly and he stared back at me, confused. “Yeah, I know all about your little habit,” I told him. “Wasn’t too hard to figure out. I’ve seen you get the sweats and disappear off god knows how many times. Those things are fucking with your mind.” I tapped my temple and he turned away again, his hands pressed to his face.

“There’s nothing wrong with my mind,” he said, sounding like he was trying to convince himself more than me. I just leaned up against the wall and sighed. I’d seen a fair few lads get the habit since the start of the war and it always ended up the same way.

“How many you taking a day?” I asked. He sucked in a deep breath and his shoulders slumped.

“I don’t know, it’s been getting a little worse lately. Usually a couple.”

“You need to stamp that out,” I told him. He started to nod, then he turned and hurried away from the cells.

“I’m going to see the Major,” he mumbled over his shoulder, but I called after him.

“Hey, Turner gave me a message for you.” King stopped and glanced back and I licked my lips. “It’s probably just more deranged ramblings, but he said to tell you: ‘where Kelly copped it’. That was the whole message.” He frowned and mulled it over, then he muttered a thank you and disappeared out of the door. I watched him go, before turning back to the bars and staring through them at the spot in the corner, where Turner had spent his last two days. King’s words started to sink in a little. The poor bastard had been a wreck, shivering on the floor like a crazed animal and muttering to himself non-stop. When they came for him earlier, he’d almost looked relieved. He stood up when ordered and let them tie his hands



behind his back, before walking out of there with a creepy, calm expression. No fuss, no begging. He only paused to give me that message, the only words he'd ever said to me. I stayed in the cell block while they executed him, the shots ringing out at 7am exactly. One more damned, wretched soul put down for good.

Suddenly I felt a pressing need to get the fuck out of there. I went back to the chair and pulled on my coat, then I stepped outside and closed the door behind me. I had no idea what to do or where to go, so I just started walking. I guess I was a little lost in my thoughts because I didn't notice that bastard Shaw until I almost bumped into him, just by the junction with the main street. He peered at me through slit eyes, treating me to that delightful little pout of his.

"Off to spread good cheer?" he asked, his tone like acid. I grimaced, my hand already clenched into a fist. Just one excuse, shithead. That's all I'm asking for. One little excuse.

"You're hilarious, Shaw. By the way, Turner's already been shot, so you might as well just crawl back in a whiskey bottle and stay there." I could have laughed when his rosy fucking face went through the same range of expressions as King's.

"Shit," he muttered, dragging a hand across his mouth. An elderly woman walked by, giving us a wide berth as she struggled with two baskets filled with cabbages. I watched her go, noticing the suspicious glance she shot our way. "He didn't even get a trial. A chance to defend himself."

"He confessed to it," I said with a sigh, "what's the point in a trial?" But King's words stuck in my mind. Maybe the poor bastard really was innocent. Maybe we shot one of our own for nothing. I was so bloody distracted that I didn't notice Shaw coming at me until his hands were already on my jacket, shoving me backwards. I staggered three steps, almost slipping over but just about keeping my footing. The bastard came at me again but this time I was ready for him. I pushed off with my right foot and lunged at him, throwing my shoulder into his chest and knocking him back. My arm wrapped around his torso and we crashed together to the ground, rolling across the pavement until he dug a knee into my hip and pushed me away. I landed on my back, snarling. Immediately I kicked over

onto my hands and knees and sprang up onto my feet. Shaw stumbled up too, his body hunched and his eyes locked on mine. I was vaguely aware of others hovering close by, watching us, but I couldn't have cared less. He'd given me all the reason I needed to pound his teeth down his throat and this time there was no King to step in the way.

"Big mistake," I grunted, filling my lungs and stepping towards him. I twisted sideways, the way my brother taught me back home. Longer reach, smaller target. My fist shot out, aimed at his jaw, but he leaned back just in time and my knuckles barely even grazed the bastard. The booze obviously hadn't dulled his reactions much. I jabbed again, catching his shoulder and knocking him away. The look of shock on his face was priceless. My heart was pounding and I almost felt sick at the thrill of what was coming. It was the same feeling I got each time I put down one of those fucking scumbag jerries, a feeling I'd almost forgotten all about. This was the way to do it. Close enough to see the fear in their eyes before you switch their lights out for good. "I'm going to smear your face across the road," I told him, lunging again. I smelled blood, but somehow he managed to grab my wrists and then he fell backwards, dragging me with him. His boot caught me in the gut and the prick tossed me to the side, where I smashed head-first into the ground and rolled onto my back. The impact stunned me; I just lay there, staring up at the sky and gasping for a moment too long. When I tried to struggle up again, a knee dropped onto my stomach and crushed the breath out of me. Shaw was on top of me, one hand on my collar (the one that was only half a fucking hand) and the other raised high. I knew what was coming and there was nothing I could do. The fist came down hard and slammed my head to the side, bouncing my brain around my skull. I bit my cheek hard on impact, splitting the fucking thing open and filling my mouth with blood. Gargling and spitting, I reached up and tried to push him off me, but he had me good. The bastard had me. The shame of it, the fucking frustration, was a hundred times worse than the pain. I couldn't even breathe with his weight resting on my torso and the blood was trickling down my throat now, choking me. I peered up at him, his face twisted with rage. He just sat there, staring back at me and shivering, then finally, when I was sure I was ready to pass out, the knee lifted and he climbed off. I jerked to my side and coughed up blood across the grey concrete, sucking back breath after glorious breath. Even then, my only thoughts were humiliation, defeat.

“Stay the fuck away from me,” Shaw muttered, and when I sat up and wiped the blood and spit from my chin, he was already disappearing around the corner.

## **Twenty (Adam)**

The Major’s face was already a deep beetroot red and I knew that any dissent would only make matters worse, but I just couldn’t help myself. I listened to his entire rant about making him look bad, the worries and concerns of his superiors and the growing distrust amongst the locals, then I took a deep breath and made my first mistake.

“I don’t think Lieutenant Turner killed that girl. I think you just shot an innocent man.” The Major stared back, his nostrils flaring with every long, loud breath. He didn’t blink. He didn’t move at all, except for those nostrils. I felt my cheeks burning up and the room started to close in on me, my peripheral vision darkening. Finally, when I was about to open my mouth to say something, anything, just to break the bloody silence, he leaned across his desk and clasped his hands together.

“When I came to your office yesterday,” he said, his voice terrifyingly calm, “Lieutenant Turner was locked in one of the cells. Lieutenant Wightman had no idea where yourself or Lieutenant Shaw had got to, but he informed me that your suspect had already confessed to the murder, something which you hadn’t actually bothered to report to me. Lieutenant Turner himself was mostly incoherent. However, he did manage to stop muttering to himself long enough to break down and apologise for what he’d done.” The Major planted his palms on the varnished wood and pushed himself up, his seat rolling backwards. Then he stepped around the desk, never once breaking his gaze. Shadows fell across his face but I could still see his eyes shining through the gloom and I was close to leaping out of my own chair when he stopped at my side. He reached out with one hand and his fingers curled around my shoulder and squeezed tight and he leaned right in until I could smell the coffee and cigars on his breath and see his

angry little pupils dilating. “If he didn’t do it,” the Major whispered, “why was he locked in your cell and why did he confess?” I could only stare up at him, gripping the arms of my chair almost tight enough to tear them free, but he didn’t even wait for an answer. “Don’t fuck me about, Captain, or I’ll have you stripped of your rank and set to work cleaning toilets with your face.” He kept his grip for another few seconds before finally releasing me and striding back around the desk. “This is over,” he said, dropping back into his chair. “I don’t want to hear any of this brought up ever again. Get out of my sight.”

I didn’t waste any time in getting out of that place. When I stepped outside into the hazy daylight, I stopped for a moment and leaned up against the wall and waited for my breath to slow. My hands were shaking so bloody hard that when I lifted them up in front of me, my fingers were just pink blurs.

“Calm down, for Christ’s sakes,” I whispered to myself. But I knew the shakes wouldn’t stop, not without a little help. There were too many people here, too many soldiers tending to the grounds or simply sat around smoking. I went up to the nearest pair, two kids who looked barely older than seventeen, and I asked for one of their fags. They stared at me like I was an escaped convict, but they handed one over all the same. I lit the thing up as I strode out of the barracks, greedily sucking in the smoke. It tasted better than good, but it was just a small fix to keep me going before the main attraction.

I finally slipped a magic pill as I walked down Brot Strasse, so called because a family of bakers used to live here apparently. Those crazy, imaginative Germans; not that we were any better with our Station Roads and our Boot Lanes. There was a barn-type wooden structure in the middle of Bread Street where grains used to be stored, until some point during the war. Now there was no grain and no bakers. Just an empty building riddled with bullet holes and half of the roof sat in a pile on the floor. I threw the pill down my throat as I passed, without even ducking out of sight. What was the bloody point? If even Wightman had figured it out, what’s to say the rest of the town didn’t know too? They knew every other sordid thing that went on.

I kept on walking, southwards from the lake. The southern part of town had taken the worst of the beating when we rolled up two months prior. This was where the Nazis had arranged themselves, ready for their suicidal last stand. As a result, we'd blown it all to merry hell and there were practically no buildings left standing. Just a million tons of rubble strewn across the empty streets. I swear you could still smell the battle in the air, a hint of oil and blood and smoke that somehow lingered and would likely never go away. I kicked my way down one of the desolate roads, my boots soon covered with dust. For a moment I forgot what I was even doing here, then I remembered. Turner's final message. My brain kept telling me it was nonsense, but let's face it, I had nothing better to do, so I made my way towards the remains of the old post office at the far end of the street.

*Where Kelly copped it...*

After we'd smashed through the jerries' barricades with the help of our tank, I had led the charge down this very street, picking off the remaining enemy who were quickly retreating to the edges of town. Most of the buildings were already broken bricks and dust by that point, but a couple were still standing and the surviving Nazis were using them for cover. I had twenty men with me and I broke the squad up, ordering each separate team to scour every last nook and cranny and deal with anyone still breathing, be it capture or kill. I chose four men to come with me and sweep the final buildings on the East side of the street. Lieutenants James Turner, Michael Shaw and Peter Kelly.

The sweep couldn't have gone smoother until we reached the old post office. It was a majestic building, standing four stories high and with a red façade that stood out in a sea of grey and brown. We filed in one at a time and then slowly scoured the ground floor, checking that no one was squirrelled away behind the counters or in any of the storage rooms. We repeated the move for the second and third floors, all office space, before finishing on the top level. The place had obviously been vacated for a long time. Every surface, even the walls, were smothered with dust and cobweb remnants and most of the windows had been smashed in. I had to squint through the gloom, leading the way across the open floor by the fog of light trickling in through the broken glass. The place was still and silent, just like the other floors. I could actually hear my own heartbeat, or perhaps it was just the blood pumping through my skull, over the crackles of gunfire

seeping in from the street. Somehow the place felt roasting hot too, getting hotter as we ascended to the top, and by now I had beads of sweat tickling their way down my temples and into my collar, itching my skin. I clutched my rifle in front of my chest, the barrel aimed at the ceiling but ready to pull down the instant I saw any movement.

We'd almost covered the whole floor, creeping silently between the abandoned desks and overturned chairs, when a noise to my left made me twist around and slip the rifle against my shoulder. I stared down the barrel, seeing out of the side of my eye that the others had all done the same. We stood there for a moment, waiting for something else to happen. Eventually I nodded to Shaw who repeated the gesture to the others and all four of us stalked forwards. Our presence was marked only by the occasional floorboard creak, but even the tiniest noise seemed to crash around the empty space and make my heart thunder against my ribcage. This wasn't the first time I'd noticed the barrel of my gun trembling back and forth, but the shakes had been getting worse. I just prayed that the other three didn't notice and kept on advancing.

Up ahead, beyond a pile of cables and plaster that had been torn out of the ceiling, was a door. Most likely just a cupboard or small storage area. I headed straight for the door and paused just in front, waiting for Shaw, Turner and Kelly to line up against the wall beside it. When they were in position, I aimed my rifle at the dead centre and nodded at Shaw. He nodded back, then he reached out with one hand and cautiously twisted the knob until there was a soft 'click'. The instant I heard that sound, I reared back and slammed my boot into the door. It flew inwards, smashing against the wall in what turned out to be a coat closet. The place was almost pitch black, but I could tell there was someone hidden inside. I heard an intake of breath when the door swung open and then a scratching noise, like something hard rubbing up against the corner of the closet.

"Nicht bewegen," I yelled, jabbing my rifle into the darkness. Without turning, I called for a torch to be shone inside. Shaw was the first to comply, firing up his pocket torch and aiming the narrow beam into the closet. Shivering there in the corner was a young German soldier. His eyes were stretched wide but they snapped shut as the light hit them and he started to jabber on, one hand raised to shield his face. I kept the gun trained on him and I ordered him to stand up and move out of the closet. He either

didn't understand or he didn't hear me over his own manic spluttering, because he didn't budge an inch. I repeated the order, this time louder. Slowly he lowered his hand, still muttering and shaking his head. He was even younger than I realised, maybe only fifteen or sixteen. He stared back at me, pale-faced and trembling, and I slowly slipped my hand from the barrel of my rifle and reached out to him.

The next thing I heard was a gunshot, screaming out as loud as hell from somewhere close behind. I felt something warm and wet spatter across my left cheek and then hands were roughly shoving into my back, forcing me into the closet. More gunshots echoed around the deserted office and I twisted myself around, seeing Shaw crouched at my side. He leaned around the door frame and returned fire with his pistol, screaming something as he unloaded his entire clip. I didn't do a damn thing. I'd frozen up, sprawled there beside the cowering kid with my rifle wedged awkwardly underneath my body. When I did finally move, it was to raise a hand to my cheek and wipe away the blood that belonged to Lieutenant Kelly.

Finally the shots ended and Lieutenant Turner appeared in the doorway, crouched down low. He stared at us wide-eyed.

"I think I got him," he whispered, "but Kelly's copped it." I could only stare back at him, trying to comprehend what had just happened. I'd been in situations like this before, shock attacks that come out of nowhere, but there was something different about this one. It was one of those moments where you feel like you've just woken from a terrible nightmare. Confused, disoriented, nauseous. I took three deep breaths and shook myself out of it as best I could.

"Take Shaw and finish the sweep," I muttered. "Make sure no one else is hiding anywhere. I'll stay with the kid."

Turned out it was just a lone German soldier, who'd been hiding behind an overturned desk in the far corner. We would have found him if the kid hadn't made a noise and diverted our attention. That's not an excuse, though, god no. The honest truth was, I fucked it up royally. I should have sent one or two men to cover the cupboard while the rest of us finished the sweep of the room. That little mistake resulted in Lieutenant Kelly's skull being all but obliterated by buckshot from the hidden soldier's shotgun.

When I saw his headless corpse lying just beyond the cupboard, my entire body went numb. I could still feel his blood on my cheek, drying against my skin. Eventually Shaw had to shake me out of my stupor and when I turned to him, his face was creased with concern.

“You okay?” he asked me and I nodded dumbly.

“Thanks,” I told him. “For what you did back there. I don’t know what happened, I just...”

Now I found myself standing in that exact spot again, staring down at the ground where Kelly’s body came to rest. Our boot prints were still surprisingly fresh in the dust, even after two months, while the floorboards were stained a coppery colour from the spilled blood. I made a sign of the cross and said a silent prayer in my head, the first time I’d done that in a while, then I swept the torch beam around the room again. Why had Turner mentioned this place before he was taken away and shot? Was it some kind of torment, a final fuck you to the arsehole who locked him away and proclaimed him guilty, because that was the convenient solution? Or did he just want me to remember?

*There’s nothing worse than being forgotten...*

I breathed in the musty air and leaned against the wall, then I slumped down onto my arse and rested my head in one hand, the other idly rolling the torch beam over the dust and grime. That was when I realised, not all of the footprints were quite so fresh. Most of them were a little faded and only two sets really stood out: my own, carving a zig-zag path across the room, and a second set, leading past where I was slumped and finishing at the cupboard door, before returning back the same way. Slowly I rose, my eyes following the second trail. The footprints were much closer together and a little scuffed leading up to the door, then spaced quite far apart on the way back.

*Almost like they were struggling at first, and then hurrying away afterwards...*



I stepped up to the cupboard where we'd stumbled across the young German soldier and cautiously reached for the handle, the same way Shaw had two months earlier. But this time, I didn't kick the bloody thing aside. Instead, I eased it open an inch at a time, aiming the torch through the narrow crack. At first I saw nothing but empty space, but my stomach lurched and I almost stumbled backwards when I pointed the beam downwards and the light fell on a human hand, lying motionless on the ground. Gripping the door so tight that my fingernails cut into the paint, I pulled it back another two inches and peered in. The hand was still attached to a body, and the body was most definitely not alive. It was a young man, his mouth hung slightly open as if he were about to speak, but his washed-over eyes and a thick gash across his right temple proved that he'd already uttered his final words. He was slumped in the corner, still fully dressed in a raincoat and boots. Something was jutting out of one of the coat pockets.

"Jesus Christ," I said, my words echoing through the empty room. I turned and pointed the torch back across the empty space, checking that I was still alone, then I stepped carefully inside the closet and knelt beside the dead man. He smelled strange, like old almonds that were well past their best, but there weren't any obvious signs of decomposition. First, I pulled the mystery object from his pocket. The thing unfurled in my grasp and I saw that it was a funny little hat. Not much help, so I set it aside and tried his other coat pockets. Finding nothing except for some cigarettes and a box of matches (both of which I shamelessly pocketed), I moved onto his trousers. In the left pocket, I found what I was looking for. I pulled out the brown leather wallet and fumbled inside, pulling out his identification card. When I read the poor bastard's name, I realised that I should have already guessed his identity. "Theodor Lemann," I whispered, staring into those dead eyes. "Beater of wives. Looks like you didn't run off for a booze and whore session after all."

I sat there for a while longer, trying to piece it all together. Turner must have killed Theodor, that much was obvious – or at the very least, he helped to dispose of the body. Perhaps Jenna Lemann the long-suffering wife was the real murderer, using her charms to convince Turner to take on disposal duties. Either way, how could Herr Lemann's demise be connected to the death of Loretta? I racked my brains, desperately trying to form a

connection and coming up with sod all. I needed to take a step back and try again.

With a grunt I rose and took one last look at Theodor Lemann, then I closed the closet door and headed for the stairs.

## **Twenty One (Emily)**

When the door swung open and Jenna's face appeared, I found myself fixed with the familiar suspicious glare. We'd never really got on, even though we'd been in the same school class together. She'd always been the popular one, adored by every boy, girl and teacher in that place (possibly adored a little too much by one or two of the teachers, if the rumours were true). Meanwhile, I'd been the awkward one who preferred reading in a corner of the classroom to jumping between the desks and setting traps for other kids. While I spent my weekends in the library, Emily was always leading swimming races in the lake or expeditions into the countryside. And every time our paths crossed, I always won another of her sad little frowns. Like she just couldn't understand why I even existed.

"Emily," she said, leaning against the frame and crossing her arms. I took a deep breath and nodded. I'd come by the previous afternoon but there was no answer and I'd quickly lost the courage to confront her. But after another sleepless night, I was determined to get this over with.

"I need to speak with you about the fire," I told her and her eyes narrowed a little more.

"The fire? What about the fire?"

"It started in the house next to mine," I said, feeling like that awkward teenage girl all over again. I shuffled my feet and swallowed. "Hetti and Friedrich's."

"Oh, really?" she said, her frown deepening. I'm not a good judge, but she did seem genuinely surprised at the news. I nodded again.

“Yes, and I heard some strange things through the wall before it happened. First, I heard them arguing, quite viciously. Then I thought I heard someone else creeping around their house...”

“Emily,” she said, stroking her cheek. “What are you telling me this for?”

“Well,” I said, suddenly feeling far too hot. “I don’t think the fire was an accident. I wondered if you might know something to explain...”

“You think I might know something? What, because I was fucking Friedrich,” she yelled, stepping out of the house. Her face had turned a sickly red in no time at all and I thought she might lash out, so I shuffled away, out of her reach. I tried to stammer an apology and calm her down but she kept on coming at me, her voice cutting right through me. “You must already know, half the town seems to be talking about it! Yes, I went to his house, to try and get him to change his mind. Why would he want to stay with that pig-ugly wife, when he could have me instead? He was crazy!” She threw up her hands and I tripped backwards, and it was only her garden wall that stopped me from collapsing. Jenna stared at me, panting so hard that each breath came out as a snort. “I made sure I told him that, with his wife stood right there behind him. Then I left. So no, I don’t know why your fire happened, but I’m glad that pair of pigs are dead.”

“I see,” was all I could mumble in return. God, I felt like I was about to cry. What was I doing here, speaking with this woman? Why was I obsessing like this? I twisted away from her and pushed out through the gate, hurrying back down the road, and I felt her eyes burning into my back the whole way.

I paid no attention to where I was going, my feet carrying me automatically down streets and alleys while I silently wept. I thought I’d grown up since those days, strong enough to not let people like Jenna Lemann get to me. But I hadn’t grown up at all. I was still that awkward girl, sat in a corner while life happened all around me. Looking after my father the way he’d looked after me when mama passed.

When I finally dragged myself out of my thoughts, I found myself standing on the old street again. I gazed at the row of burned-out buildings, little more than piles of brick and dust. At first, I couldn’t even tell which house had been ours. Five or six houses around Hetti and Friedrich’s place

had simply crumbled under the heat, leaving little more than rubble and some charred brick skeletons. I walked slowly up to the ruins and eventually found the right spot, thanks to the web-like patch of weeds growing in the tiny, half-buried mound of mud that used to be our front garden. Yesterday there had been men picking through the remains, but today I was all alone. I glanced down the street, then I stepped onto the heap of debris that used to be our house and I slowly, carefully made my way to the middle. There I sat down on the rubble and stared up at the sky, my tears now just sticky smears on my cheeks.

I had no watch, so I had no idea how long I was sat there for, just watching clouds drift by. Eventually my muscles grew stiff and I started to notice sharp edges digging into my skin here and there, so I rose and stretched and rubbed my leg where it had gone to sleep. And that was when I saw it. Something I hadn't seen the night of the fire, or noticed in the aftermath. I frowned and stepped closer, but no, it wasn't a deception. Right then, I realised I'd been right all along. The fire was no accident.

## **Twenty Two (Terry)**

I needed to get off the street and clean up, so I lugged myself past the cell block and into the office. It was only the second time I'd been in there and when I stepped inside I remembered why. The place was fucking creepy. Too quiet for a start and empty except for three desks and three chairs. Then there was that chill that somehow lingered, even though it was warm outside. I swear this fucking hole was haunted by some kraut ghosts and they probably weren't too happy we were taking over.

I went to the tiny toilet at the back of the room and shut myself in, before checking out the damage in the cracked mirror stuck to the wall over the sink. Straight away I grimaced, and even that little motion hurt. I looked as bad as King, with a purple patch under my left eye that almost matched his perfectly. That was on top of the lump that was steadily sprouting out of the

back of my head. I took a deep breath, pushed it back out again. Then I leaned over the sink and spat about half a pint of blood down the plughole.

There wasn't much I could do to patch myself up, so I just swilled some cold water and got all the blood and gunk out of my mouth. I had just turned off the tap when I heard the office door slam shut. Slowly I turned and stared at the closed toilet door. If it was Shaw, he'd be in for it. He would wish that he'd finished me off by the time I was done with the prick. I eased up to the door and I gripped the handle, muscles flexed and ready for action. But when I threw the door open and stepped out of the toilet, I found myself staring into the petrified face of Captain Adam King.

"Jesus," he stammered, dragging a hand through his hair. "You scared the hell out of me, Wightman." Then he squinted at my face. "Bloody hell, what happened to you?"

"Oh, I just walked into a tree," I replied, turning away and slumping down into Lane's old seat. "How'd the talk with the Major go?"

"Not so good. But I figured out what Turner's little message meant. I found Theodor Lemann's body in the old post office, stuffed inside a coat closet." He said it so matter-of-factly that I had to replay the sentence in my head, just to make sure I hadn't misunderstood him.

"Who's Theodor Lemann?" was the first of many questions that sprang to mind.

"Just some nasty little wife beater. Turner stepped in when he was roughing up his missus in the street."

"So...Turner killed him?"

"Chances are it was either him or the wife, Jenna Lemann. I want you to go speak with her, tell her we found her husband's body. She reckoned he'd run off after finding out she was having an affair with Friedrich Klingmann."

"Klingmann," I repeated, the name familiar somehow. King nodded.

"Him and his wife were the toasted couple from the fire."

“Jesus fucking Christ,” I muttered, leaning back and resting my head on my hands, until a twinge of pain shot down my neck. I grunted and slumped forwards again instead. “So you want me to see if she’s a lying, murdering scumbag, basically.”

“Just see how she reacts,” King said. “I get the feeling she won’t be too remorseful, even if she didn’t personally stave his head in, but maybe she’ll give something away. Try asking to see her husband’s belongings too, might give us some clues.”

“What are you gonna do?” I asked. King scratched his nose and sighed.

“First I’m going to try and find Shaw.” Just the mention of his name made me grind my teeth, but King didn’t seem to notice. “Then I’m going back to Loriett’s grandfather’s house. I can’t shake the feeling that those two murders are connected.”

“Still obsessing over that,” I said and his jaw visibly tightened, the bone poking through his cheek. I thought he’d have another go at me, but he just let it slide this time.

“I’ll see you back here,” he said, then he turned and walked out.

Of course, I had no fucking idea where this Jenna Lemann lived, so it took me an age to track her down. As usual, I had to ask half a dozen locals for directions before I got an answer that wasn’t “keine Englisch” or some other shite in German. When I did eventually track her down, she was over in the West side of town. Her house was actually one of the best I’d seen around this poxy place, a proper mansion from the outside with some weird German car sat on the driveway and a nicely tended garden. I pushed through the gate and strode up to the little path and banged a fist on the door.

When Jenna finally opened up, she was already wearing a fed up little pout. Still, even with a face like a slapped arse, she was still cute as fuck. I imagined some cowardly prick smacking around those pretty cheeks and I wished I’d had the chance to kill the bastard myself. Turner was definitely rising in my estimates; shame they went and shot the cunt already.

“What is it, what do you want?” she asked in slightly ropery English. I flashed her my winning smile, pure charm through and through, then I

launched into it.

“I’m looking for Jenna Lemann,” I said and she rolled her eyes.

“Yes, yes, I am Jenna. What do you want?”

“It’s bad news, I’m afraid.” I wondered if I should build up to it or something, but I decided, fuck it. Just get it over with. Like King said, I didn’t expect her to exactly break down with grief. “We found your husband’s body.”

“Body,” she said, her voice suddenly soft and the angry little pout dissolving from her face. I nodded, keeping a close watch on her.

“Looks like he was murdered. Right here in town.”

“So he didn’t run away,” she said. She was staring at my chest, but her gaze was just passing right through me, like I wasn’t even there.

“Is it okay if I come in?” I asked. “Look around a bit? Standard procedure and all that.” She didn’t answer, she just sort of stepped aside and I pushed in past her. The house was just as gorgeous on the inside, with its bright white walls and shiny floors and furniture that looked bloody ancient. Clearly one of them, her or the dead husband, had a fucking good job on the go. I hoped for her sake that it wasn’t the corpse; I just had the feeling she wouldn’t cope well with sudden unexpected poverty. Glancing around, I strode into the lounge and then turned and smiled again as she slid in behind me, the colour drained from her cheeks. “When was the last time you saw him?” I asked. Seemed like the sensible kind of question a proper copper would ask, just going off their interviews with me from back in the day. Establish a timeline and all that bollocks. She paused while she tried to remember, or maybe she was just making something up.

“Three days ago,” she told me. “He left the house, angry. I thought he was going to Kungsbrucken again. He’s done it before when we’ve had a fight. Usually he drinks himself stupid and takes some cheap women and then he comes back full of apologies.”

“Right. You didn’t think of driving over there to find him?”

“I did not want to see his face again,” she spat. “I leave him to his drinking and his whores.” Oh yes, full of pity, this one. But I had a feeling

in my guts that she hadn't been part of some conspiracy to bump off her old man. In fact, I had another theory brewing, which seemed all the more plausible given her reaction.

"Your husband," I said, "he left because you were having an affair, right?" She slung a filthy look at me, but not the kind of filthy look I enjoy. This one basically suggested that she'd like to rip my bollocks off with her teeth, before chewing them up and spitting them out.

"Yes," she said, in a tone that could make flowers wither and dogs drop whimpering onto their backs.

"How did he find out about it?" I asked.

"I told him."

"You told him," I said, nodding. "So, you two were arguing and you wanted to really hurt him. A killing blow, so to speak. Was that it?" She took her time before she answered.

"He'd been angry ever since he tried slapping me around and someone put him in his place. He didn't dare touch me again the day after, but he kept screaming at me, calling me a fucking whore. I said yes, I was having an affair, ha!" She actually laughed, throwing her head back. I started to get a little concerned that I was trapped in a room with a psychopath, especially since my gun was back at the barracks. "He was so furious, I thought he was going to strangle me on the spot. But instead he smashed one of my mother's vases and then he rushed out and that was the last time I saw him."

"Did you tell him who you were having an affair with?" I asked. She looked confused for a moment, then that sinister scowl crossed her face again.

"No, I didn't tell him," she hissed. "Is that what this is really all about? Did you come here to accuse him of starting that fire?" I held my hands up.

"No, I'm not accusing him of anything."

"Good," Jenna said, teeth still bared. "That do-gooder Emily Hanna was here probing into it too, accusing *me* of burning those houses! I'll tell you what I told her, I had nothing to do with it and I saw nothing 'suspicious'." She shook her head and threw her hair back with one hand and I shuffled



back a half-step. “Oh, but I did see old Frau Bischmann passing by with her dog while I was sat out in the square,” she continued. “She’s sixty years old and hunched so bad she has to stare at your shoes when she talks to you. But maybe you should go arrest her, just in case *she* started the fire?” Her eyes were practically popping out of their sockets and I nodded slowly, ready to make my excuses and bugger off out of there before I went the way of her husband. But she just kept on going. “Or maybe it was the limping soldier, who looked like his leg was ready to fall off. He sounds like a perfect suspect, yes?”

That got me. I was actually sizing up my escape route, which sadly involved pushing around her to get to the front door, but now she had my full attention again. I stepped up to her and lowered my face so it was inches from hers.

“Limping soldier? You saw a limping soldier, what, just before the fire?” Suddenly she shrunk a little, her tongue dragging across her bright red lips.

“Yes, in the square.”

“He was walking towards the street that burned down?”

“Yes. But he-”

“What did he look like, was he quite young? Short, dark hair?”

“I don’t know,” Jenna spat, her voice rising again, “it was dark and I wasn’t really paying attention!”

“Okay,” I said, dragging my palm across my face. “Okay. Shit. I need to...I need to go...” All of a sudden, my fucking heart was going like the clappers. Surely it couldn’t be...it made no sense, but I had to check. “Thank you,” I muttered to her as I hurried past and let myself out.

## **Twenty Three (Emily)**

I was shaking as I stepped inside the infirmary and my skin tingled at the chill in the air. Outside it was a warm day, but in here it felt like a fridge, so cold that I expected to see my own breath. I wrapped my arms around myself and made my way down the corridor, to the treatment room at the far end. My pace slowed before I reached the door and now doubts were flooding my thoughts, compelling me to stop just before I pushed inside. I didn't have any kind of proof; this was just another one of my careless, impulsive ideas. I'd already thrown accusations at the English and if I went ahead with this, what was to stop them from dragging me into a prison cell and leaving me to die and rot? I was on the verge of turning around and hurrying back out again, but then I thought of my father, still spread out on the cold floor of the morgue. I chewed on my lower lip and closed my eyes, feeling the pulse of my heart beat and the gentle roar of each breath I sucked in. Then I pushed through the door and slipped inside the room.

He was the only person there, sat up on one of the beds with what looked like a diary clutched in his hands. The one called Oliver. He glanced up at the sound of the door creaking open and his expression froze. I stood there for a moment, then I slowly stepped closer and swallowed.

"I just came to ask you one question," I said in English. He didn't move, didn't say anything. He didn't even blink. "Were you in our garden again, the night of the fire?"

"Oh, god," Oliver said under his breath, just loud enough for me to hear. His head dipped and he pressed his face into his hands, his breath sounding like a hissing pipe. He began to mutter something, but his words were smothered by his palms and I couldn't make them out. I stood there, fixated, unable to move as he started to violently cough and splutter. The answer was clear enough.

The afternoon before the fire, I'd nailed the barbed wire back up around the fence, making sure there were no gaps where anyone could slip through. Then just half an hour ago, sat on the rubble that used to be our home, I'd noticed a strip where the wire had been cut clean away, probably with pliers. A strip just big enough for a person to climb over.

When his hands finally dropped, his face was bright red and his eyes were streaming. "I just wanted to help," he cried out. "Lisa. She looked just

like my Lisa. I couldn't help it, I had to see her again."

"So it wasn't me you were spying on," I said, a chill running along both of my arms and down my spine. "It was Hetti." He just stared back at me, and I realised that he probably didn't even know her name.

"The man, he were screaming at her. Then he grabbed her, by the shoulders. I knew he were gonna hurt her, so I got inside an' I took this knife from the kitchen an' I ran upstairs. When I got up there, he turned and he looked at me an' he started saying all these things in German. I told him to gets his hands off of her, leave her alone! But then he just came at me and I had no choice." He shook his head furiously, his eyes wild. "I had no choice. An' then, I wanted to tell her...I wanted to say to her, everything's fine, he won't hurt you no more. But before I could..." By now he was sobbing, his face gleaming by the light from the single bulb dangling overhead. "She ran from me. She ran to the stairs, but she must've slipped. I couldn't stop her in time. The sound of her falling, god, it were horrible. I swear, I could hear her breaking inside. And when she hit the bottom, I knew she were gone. She were all twisted, her head pointing backwards over her shoulder, an' oh god, she were staring right at me. I knew then, it were my Lisa. She were staring at me, accusing me. Two times now, I couldn't save her. I just let her die."

Everything inside of me told me to turn around and leave, get out of there as fast as I could. But there was still something that didn't make sense.

"Why start the fire?" I asked, choking up. Oliver stared at me, blinking over and over.

"I just panicked," he muttered. "I heard they were gonna shoot Turner for strangling that girl, an' I knew they'd do the same to me. So I poured out the oil from a lamp an' I set it going with some matches. I never meant for it to spread like that, I thought it'd just make it look like an accident." He sniffed, fixing his eyes on me. "Oh god, you're gonna tell them, aren't ya? Jesus, Christ."

Without any warning, he suddenly leapt from the bed and rushed straight at me, his arms stretched out in front of him. Even with his injured leg, he moved fast enough to close the distance in no time at all. A cry of alarm caught in my throat and I jerked around, my hands scrambling for the door

handle, but he was already on me. I felt his fingers snatch my hair and he yanked my head backwards, his other arm wrapping across my throat and tightening. My airway squeezed shut, trapping the air in my lungs. The bastard dragged me backwards and my hand slipped from the door handle and instead I reached up and clawed at his arm, desperately trying to pull him away. I knew it was no use, he was far too strong for me, but I kept on fighting, trying anything I could to wriggle out of his grasp. My feet skidded across the floor and already my chest was burning, crying out for fresh oxygen. Oliver twisted around, trying to pull me over to the other side of the room while grunting something in my ear, and my left leg suddenly brushed against a sharp edge. It was one of the beds, wedged up against the wall. I could feel the fight draining from my body, but I had just enough strength left for one last escape attempt. I lifted my legs up, bending my knees and digging my heels into the bed frame. Then, with all I had left, I straightened my legs and pushed off from the bed. Oliver lost his balance with a cry of panic and the pair of us collapsed backwards into a metal table covered with medical implements, which scattered across the floor. His arm released and I rolled away, gasping and choking.

I didn't waste any time. The second I was free, I scrambled away from him. I felt his hand snatch at my leg, his fingers wrapping around my ankle, but I kicked back and he yelped and let go, pulling one of my shoes off with his fingertips. He was yelling after me, shouting that he was sorry. I paid no attention, launching myself back to my feet and sprinting for the door. This time I managed to wrench it open and then I was out in the corridor, the exit straight ahead of me at the opposite end, but behind I could hear Oliver staggering up and kicking aside the things that had scattered across the floor. I didn't waste my breath screaming for help; no one else was here, the whole goddamn place deserted. My only chance was to get out.

I was halfway down the corridor when I heard the surgery door creaking just behind and footsteps booming towards me. Even with one shoe, I knew I could make it out before he caught up with me. I just knew it. But then, in one cruel moment, my last hope died. Straight ahead, through the cracked and chipped windows in the double doors, I saw the other soldier, Wightman, striding towards the building. He was close, his hands already outstretched to push his way inside. I slowed and almost stumbled, my heart slamming into my ribs, but then my eyes fell on an open doorway to my

right, leading to a darkened room. I didn't know what was inside, but I twisted and threw myself inside anyway, choking as I tried to breathe.

Although a pair of thick curtains were drawn across the window at the far end of the room, from the crack of invading light I could just make out the silhouettes of a pair of beds, both with empty wooden cots positioned next to them. A privacy curtain on wheels had been rolled to the right side of the room, out of the way, and I headed straight for it and ducked behind, pressing myself into the narrow space between the curtain and an enormous cabinet. My eyes scoured the cabinet, looking for anything I could use as a weapon. The thing was filled with all kinds of junk, books and glass bottles mostly. In desperation, I reached up and grabbed one of the bottles. It was heavy and half-filled with some kind of liquid that sloshed around inside as I clutched the thing to my chest.

Out in the corridor, I heard the two men talking.

"Mick," Wightman called out, his footsteps echoing down the hallway. "What you doing up?"

"Terry," Oliver replied, his voice filled with panic. "You've got to help me!"

"Help you, what you on about? I thought you were supposed to be laid up with that leg?" The footsteps halted and I could hear panting right outside the door. "You been able to walk on that thing the whole time?"

"Terry, look-"

"Answer me, Mick! Were you out the night that fire got started?"

Silence, except for the panting and the hammering of my own heart, until suddenly someone cried out and a loud bang like a gunshot made me shudder and almost drop the bottle. What the hell was happening? I wanted to see but I was too terrified to move, so I stood perfectly still and willed my heart to slow. For a moment, nothing happened. My ears were still ringing from the gunshot but the two men had fallen silent. But then I heard what sounded like someone weeping; frantic sobs and snivelling, followed by a sharp intake of breath. And when he spoke again, it made my stomach crush up tight.

“Look what you made me do,” Oliver muttered. “Look. Look. Oh god, I didn’t want this to happen!” Now he was screaming and I crouched down, staring at the wall and praying for him to leave. But then I heard him move and the floorboards by the doorway creaked. He was coming into the room. He must have been limping badly, because his steps were uneven; it sounded like he was dragging his injured leg behind him, the edge of his boot scraping across the floor. I clutched the bottle tight and carefully turned so I was facing the curtain. The thing was just a flimsy piece of plastic but I couldn’t see anything through it and I didn’t dare glance around the edge. All I could do was listen. “I’m sorry,” Oliver said, his chest heaving. “I’m sorry, I didn’t want this.” He paused, sniffing and muttering to himself, then I heard that scraping sound again. He was heading towards the curtain. Towards me.

I closed my eyes and steadied myself, then I shifted the bottle to my left hand and gripped the privacy curtain’s metal frame with my right. I waited just long enough, until he was close enough to hear him panting and cursing on the other side of the screen. Then I screamed with all my might and charged forwards, throwing the curtain ahead of me. The screen rolled forwards and I was glad I kept low, as another gunshot screamed around the room and the curtain flapped as a bullet tore through before passing an inch over my head and exploding one of the bottles behind me. A half second later, the curtain hit Oliver and jerked to a standstill. He swept it aside with a roar of frustration, his gun ready to fire again, but I was already on him with the bottle raised high. I brought it down as hard as I could, slamming the thick glass into the top of his skull. The thing cracked apart and fell in large chunks to the ground and Oliver went with it, not making another sound as he collapsed and lay still.

I was almost certain that he was out cold, but I didn’t hang around to check. I just grabbed the gun from his hand, uncurling his fingers from the grip, and then I ran out of the room and back into the corridor. I’d forgotten all about Wightman, so I stumbled and almost tripped over his body when I swerved right towards the exit. He was sprawled there in the middle of the hallway, flat on his back. Oliver had shot him in the chest. His uniform was soaked with blood and a small puddle was forming at his side on the bright white floor.

“God,” I muttered, stepping around him. I was about to sprint for the exit when a noise stopped me, a grunt so quiet that I almost missed it. Unbelievably, the noise came from Wightman. I turned and peered down and saw that his eyes were open and swivelling side to side and his lips were moving. He coughed violently and a few tiny drops of blood speckled his cheek.

“Miserable bastard,” he groaned. “Shot me, with my own fucking gun.” His eyes locked on me and he released a long, throaty breath. “Oh great, it’s you,” he said.

“Shit,” I whispered, shifting the gun to my other hand. What could I do? Leave him here to die? Put another bullet in him? I swept a hand across my brow, wiping away the sweat that was dripping down my skin, then I cursed again and knelt at his side. The wound was just to the right of his breast bone, a finger-sized hole that oozed blood through his jacket. I pulled a hankie from my pocket and pressed it over the hole and Wightman winced, his lips pulling back over his teeth. “Stop squirming,” I told him and he glared back at me.

“Fuck that, just get the doctor!”

“I don’t know where he is,” I yelled back, a second before the front doors swung open. I glanced over my shoulder and saw the English doctor stop dead at the end of the hallway, a pile of books wedged between his arm and his torso. He was staring at me with his mouth hanging open. “Quick,” I screamed at him, “he needs help!”

“What the bloody hell,” I heard him say, before he dropped the books and came running. He staggered to a halt just a few steps away and I wondered what he was waiting for, until I realised that he was staring at the gun in my hand.

“I didn’t shoot him,” I said, shaking my head. “It was the other soldier, in there!” I nodded at the room and the doctor frowned.

“Bugger me, what on earth did I miss?”

## Twenty Four (Katherine)

First thing I felt was a tingly sickness, deep down inside my stomach. Or maybe it was the sharp, nasty taste that started in my mouth and went right to the back of my throat. I swallowed hard as my eyes opened, hoping to wash it all away. Right then, I still didn't know where I was, or what had happened. I groaned at the throbbing pain in my head and wondered why my arms were so stiff, but then I focused on the dirty yellow wall in front of me and I realised that I wasn't at home. That was enough of a shock to wake me right up. But when I tried to move, I realised that I was stuck in place. I was sat on a chair and my arms were twisted back behind me and I felt something rough tied around my wrists, pinning them together and securing them to the chair. My feet were the same; I leaned forwards as far as I could, which wasn't far, and I saw that my ankles were tied together with a piece of old rope, which was also wrapped around the legs of the chair.

That was when I remembered what happened. Pieter, the scarf, those creepy little wooden figures. He had tied me to this chair while I was unconscious. I was his prisoner.

I twisted my head back, my chin resting on my shoulder, but all I could see was more yellow. By now I was wide awake again. The throbbing headache was still there but I barely even noticed it. I was too busy wriggling my arms, trying to wrestle one of them free. Everything I tried was useless. After five minutes, my wrists ached worse than ever and the rope was cutting into my skin even tighter. I ground my teeth together to keep myself from screaming in anger and instead I tried rocking from side to side, squirming back and forth across the chair. The thing was solid and heavy, so I barely managed to lift the legs more than an inch at first before they slammed back down onto the floor, but I kept at it all the same. Finally I got the rhythm and the legs lifted a little higher with each shunt, then with one last jerk I got the chair over. I didn't have much time to brace myself as I toppled over and the force of smacking into the floor almost stunned me. That headache rushed back, worse than ever. I let out a soft moan and tried again to squirm free, but the stupid chair hadn't broke in the fall and I



couldn't move at all. The sickness came back and I threw up across the floorboards, shaking so hard I thought my neck might just snap.

The effort of tipping the chair had taken all of my energy. I lay there, my throat burning from the vomit, trying not to cry or whimper. I hoped that they'd left me alone in the house, but now I could hear footsteps just outside the room and then the hushed sound of the door creeping open behind me. I clenched every muscle, wishing that I was still passed out, wondering what they would do when they saw me lying on my side with sick all over me. The footsteps came towards me and I closed my eyes and held my breath. From the wheezing alone I knew that it was Pieter's father, Arndt. I could barely believe it, but he must have known what Pieter did and he must be helping his son to cover it up.

"What have you done to yourself," he croaked, shuffling up next to my head. I kept my eyes shut, even when he bent down and grabbed me roughly by the shoulders and tried to pick me back up again. He barely got me off the ground before he lost his grip and I dropped back again, my skull bouncing hard enough to make me cry out. I bit my lip and opened my eyes, peering up at his wrinkled face.

"Why did you tie me up," I asked. He stared at me, sucking on his cheek the way he always did when he was thinking.

"I can't let you go," he finally replied, his voice soft. "You know too much."

"So you're going to kill me?" I asked, and I couldn't keep my voice from trembling. He crushed his eyes shut and nodded slowly. "Then why tie me up?" I spat, my vision blurring. "Why not just kill me?"

"It will be dark soon," he said, glancing at the window and pushing his glasses up his nose with a fingertip. "I'll...do it soon. I just need a place that's more discrete than those woods."

"I'm not going to tell anyone. I won't tell anyone about Pieter and Lorielt." I knew that pleading was a waste of time but I didn't know what else to do. Arndt shook his head and sighed.

"You know I can't take that chance." He walked away and I thought that he was leaving, but then he returned a moment later clutching another chair.

He placed the chair in front of me and eased himself into it with a groan and brushed the dust from his trousers. "It wasn't Pieter who killed Lorient," he told me with a frown. "It was me. It was these hands." He lifted his arms and stared down at his trembling fingers. "The same as you, she knew too much. I really didn't want to, she was a sweet young girl, such a sweet young thing, but I had no choice." He sniffed and stared at a spot on the wall, his eyes misting over like he was playing it over in his head.

"I don't understand," I said, struggling once again to free my hands. "What did she know?"

"That boy of mine," Arndt said. He coughed into his fist, his whole body shaking, then he rubbed his mouth with the back of his hand. "He was obsessed with her. I saw it every time she came into the library. He would stop whatever he was doing and just stare at her, like she was the only woman in the whole of Germany. At first he wouldn't speak with her, but then he worked up the courage and...she seemed to like him, too. That was when I started to worry. He can't keep his mouth shut, no one can!" Arndt gripped the arms of the chair and rocked back and forth, just ever so slightly, and the sight of it made my stomach shrink even more. He looked like he was possessed. "Just like Schmidt, the old fool. He caved as well. I had to deal with him before he spilled out everything to the English. He was my friend and he turned on me, just like that!"

"You killed Herr Schmidt too?" I stammered, my stomach cramping. I thought back to him lying face-down in his kitchen, his blood covering everything around him. The force it must have taken to crack open his skull. Arndt sighed again.

"He let his guilt take over. He was about to confess and drag me down with him."

"Confess what?" I asked, my wrists burning as the rope cut into my skin. But I didn't stop trying to force my hands free, even when I felt a trickle of warm blood run down my palm.

"We were working with the Nazis," Arndt said and the breath caught in my chest. He stared at me with a grim expression and shook his head. "We had no choice. At first they asked us to spy for them, to let them know what was happening in the town behind closed doors. Paranoid, delusional

sociopaths. They thought that because we served our country once before, that we would do whatever they wanted. But when we hesitated, they threatened us. They said they would burn every last book I owned, and worse besides. But of course, once we begrudgingly accepted, they expected results. They wouldn't believe us if we said we knew nothing at all. So if we had nothing to report, we just made it up. We pretended that someone was secretly homosexual or a Jew sympathiser."

"But they were killed," I said, my voice hoarse. "They were all taken away and killed!"

"You don't know that," Arndt shot back, fiddling with his glasses again.

"My parents were taken away, they never came back! If they weren't dead, they'd have come back! Did you tell the Nazis about them? Did you let them murder my parents?"

"Hush," he said with a frown. "Hush, now. I don't know, I honestly don't."

I couldn't hold back any longer. Tears flooded down my cheeks and I cried out, writhing and kicking across the floor. How could one man be so cruel? He was a hundred times worse than any Nazi, giving up his own people to those monsters. Killing them when they found out his filthy secret. First Herr Schmidt and then Loriett. And now me. God, I had to escape and warn everyone.

Arndt watched me for a while, that same frown stuck on his face, until a door slammed downstairs. Then he rose and dusted himself off again.

"That will be Pieter back," he said. "Don't make any more noise, please, child. Don't make this any harder." With that, he stepped out of the room and I listened to his footsteps retreat back down the staircase. I kept on fighting against the ropes, until they sliced so deep into my skin that they started to cut off my circulation. Then I just lay there, weeping into the dust and praying for the end to come quickly.

## Twenty Five (Adam)

I found Shaw back at the barracks. He'd wandered there after seeing the empty cell to find out what had happened and Moss had told him all about Turner's fate. In a melancholic mood, he'd then picked up his post, which consisted of a single letter. The thing was clutched in one hand and a cigarette in the other when I came across him, slumped against a wall in the yard.

"Hey," I said and he nodded gently, without even looking at me. I ran my tongue across my lips and sighed. "Take it you heard the news."

"Looks like our job here's done, eh," he replied with a grim smile. I shook my head.

"Not just yet. If Turner didn't kill Lorient, then someone else did. I'm going back to Schmidt's house to look around again. I can't shake the feeling that we've missed something." I waited for some kind of reaction, but Shaw just slipped the fag in his mouth and took a long, hard drag, sucking up so much bloody smoke I thought it would come whistling out of his ears. I folded my arms and tilted my head. "You coming along?"

"I guess so," he said, folding the letter in two and slipping it into his jacket pocket.

"What's that?" I asked. "News from home?"

"Yeah," he muttered, finishing off the cigarette and crushing it under his boot. "From my friend, the one I got to spy on Mary." A weight popped into my gut.

"Bad news?"

"You could say that." We started to stride back across the yard, heading for the arched entrance. "I guess she must have noticed him checking up on her or something. Apparently they got talking and he took her out for afternoon tea and now they're madly in love."

"What?" I glanced at him, brow furrowed. "So the man you sent to spy on her is now...they're a thing?"

“Fucking irony,” Shaw said, followed immediately by a throaty chuckle, although his eyes had misted over and he sounded more likely to break down and start sobbing. I shuffled my feet and released a drawn-out breath.

“I’m sorry, Mike. That’s...a really shitty thing to happen.”

“It’s okay,” he said with a sniff. “In a strange, fucked up kind of way, I’m actually glad I know. Now she doesn’t have to keep me awake, night after endless bloody night.” It was a sound philosophy, I guess. Get the pain over with in one swift, sudden burst, rather than dragging it out with endless, rotten hope.

We soon arrived at Schmidt’s house and let ourselves in; I’d already picked up the key from the office before leaving. Inside the old guy’s place it was strangely cold. I automatically rubbed my hands together as we stepped into the hallway, before turning left into the kitchen. The room had been left almost untouched since the murder, so the sight of spilled blood greeted us, along with a pungent stench. A small band of flies, disturbed by our sudden arrival, took off from the blood-drenched surfaces and lazily circled the kitchen. I waved them off and swept my gaze across the room. A sudden, sickening thought crossed my mind. Lorielt had come here and seen this, shortly before her own untimely death. She’d seen her grandfather’s brains smeared across the floor, smelled the reek of his demise. Christ, the things she’d gone through on that final day.

“What are we looking for?” Shaw asked, shuffling up next to me. I breathed out.

“If I’m right, then it wasn’t Jurgen who killed Schmidt. He just stumbled into this nightmare and took the opportunity to swipe some goods. We didn’t bother to search around here when we found the body because we thought we already had our man, so maybe a little detective work will throw some new light on what happened, with Schmidt and with LORIETT.”

“Sounds good,” Shaw said with a glimmer of a smile. “I’m actually starting to feel like a proper detective here. Maybe we can do this for real when we get back to merry old England, eh?”

“Let’s not get crazy,” I replied. “I’ll take the kitchen, you have a look upstairs. If you see anything you think might be important, give me a

shout.”

I had to tread lightly to make sure I didn't disturb anything, or for that matter smear gore all over my clothes, which wasn't easy considering how much of the stuff had gushed around the place (it's amazing how just a pint's worth can look like a gallon when it's sprayed about). A number of footprints had already dried in the blood covering the floor tiles, no doubt caused by the body removal. They definitely hadn't been there when we first came by. I was about to glance away when I noticed that a couple of them were significantly different. Rather than a full, flat boot print, they were formed of two circular patterns, one large and one small. They looked like the kind of prints you might get from a woman's shoe, one with a rounded heel.

I paused, staring at the prints. Surely Lorient didn't walk through this patch? To do something like that, she'd have to have a pretty bloody good reason. The marks seemed to lead to nowhere, though. They just stopped next to the wall and then returned, overlapping the old set. My eyes drifted up the wall and at first I didn't see anything, but then I noticed something glinting, just above head height. Some tiny little thing was embedded in the paint. I leaned in closer, trying not to step in the blood myself, and realised that it was a slightly bent nail. Something had been hanging there.

“Oh, shit,” I muttered, thinking back to the morning we found the body. It was a sickening blur now. The shakes had started the moment I walked into the grisly scene and then things got a little fuzzy after popping the magic pill. But I did remember seeing some kind of painting on that wall, a picture of...Christ, what the hell was it again? Slowly the images came back to me. There had been more, dotted around the place. I hurried from the kitchen and checked in the hallway. Same thing. I swore that a painting had been hanging just beside the toilet door. I'd almost knocked the bloody thing off the wall myself, brushing past it on my way to sink that pill.

“Wilhelm,” I said to myself. “That's what it was. World War One, pictures of Wilhelm.” Lorient must have taken them down for some reason. I obviously didn't know the girl, but she would have been born well after the end of the Great War, so I doubted she would have taken them to hang in her own house. Not unless she wanted some kind of memento of her grandfather, perhaps.

I kept on searching but turned up nothing else, not even a slight clue that might help us. I was just finishing off when I heard Shaw stomping back down the stairs and he appeared a moment later, that misty look in his eyes again. The sticky sheen of freshly smeared tears glistened on his cheeks. He stood in the doorway and swayed slightly and I gently rose and stepped over to him.

“Any luck?” I asked, my voice soft. He looked up at me and shook his head.

“Nothing, really. At least nothing I thought might help. He’s got lots of war mementos, but not much else. Did you fare any better?”

“Only thing I noticed was that some of the paintings have been taken down, all World War One junk. Looks like Loretta might have carried them off somewhere.”

“Probably took them home,” Shaw said with a nod.

“I can’t remember seeing them there,” I muttered, thinking back to my quick inspection. Truth be told, my head was in a bad place when I looked around. All I really remembered was the scattering of clothes on her bed. “But anyway, doesn’t it seem a little strange?” I asked. “This girl just found out that her grandfather was dead, so what does she do? She takes down some of his paintings and carries them off.”

“People do strange things when grief hits,” Shaw said, massaging his own neck with his two remaining fingers. “Back at school, this kid called Jack Wilmott was playing in the old quarry when a landslide started, buried him so deep they couldn’t dig out his body for two whole days. His mother was traumatised. As soon as they pulled him out, she tried to drag him away. Kept saying he wasn’t dead, he was just asleep. Half his ribs were poking out, but he was just resting.”

“Aye, that’s just denial,” I said. “I’ve seen that loads of times, even from the lads.”

“Right, but it’s what she did afterwards that was so strange,” Shaw replied. “She started calling the family dog Jack and treating him like he was a boy. She’d feed him normal food and try and dress him in the dead lad’s clothes. I swear, it was the funniest thing in the world when we were

kids, but looking back now.” He shook his head and grimaced. “It’s probably the saddest thing I can think of.”

“Still doesn’t explain where these paintings wandered off to,” I said. “Let’s go take a look at her house, see if she took them back there.”

We had to swing by the barracks to pick up Lorieta’s house key and then we made our way to that alleyway and its delicious dead fish aroma. Of course, the house was still in the same state, completely untouched, and I noted the bare walls both downstairs and up. We searched through her single closet and the cupboards downstairs and came up empty. No paintings, that much was obvious.

“So, she took them somewhere else,” I muttered to Shaw and he crossed his arms and leaned against the wall.

“Surely someone saw her lugging those things about town.”

“They weren’t big,” I said. “Maybe she had them covered too, for protection. People are carrying things up and down these streets all day, to and from market. She seemed to do a pretty good job of blending into the background anyway.”

“Jesus Christ,” Shaw said. “So what now?”

“I think we’re basically bugged,” I replied. “Unless we find those paintings. It’s sod all, really, but it’s all we’ve got.”

The moment we stepped outside, I reached into my jacket for a cigarette. I hadn’t needed any of my pills so far today, which was a blessed relief, but I’d more than made up for it by chain-smoking my way through a whole packet of fags. I’d just lit up when I heard a door creak open and when I glanced to my left, I saw a skinny woman struggling from the house next door with a sack slung over one shoulder. She shot us a cautious look, freezing for a moment before dropping her gaze.

“Hallo,” I said and she briefly peered at me again and threw me a quick nod. Normally I would have just let her go, but times were desperate. We needed something, anything, to get us back on the trail. So I stepped towards her and tried my best “entschuldigung sie bitte, sprechen sie



Englisch?" At first she just stared back and I thought I was out of luck, but then she gave another hesitant nod.

"Little," she mumbled.

"Loriett," I said, pointing to the house we'd just stepped from. "Did you see her, three days ago?"

"Maybe." The woman shrugged and sat the sack down by her feet with a grunt. "Just pass by, in street."

"Did you notice anything strange, unusual? Was she carrying anything?"

"No," was the short and simple response. She was wearing the usual beleaguered look I was more than used to from the locals, telling me in no uncertain terms that I was encroaching on her time. Shaw brushed past me and took a half-step closer.

"Look," he said, his own impatience obvious. "We need some help. Do you know if she had any friends, anyone we can speak with?"

"She was quiet girl," the woman said. "Only family is *opa*, he dead too. And they..." She paused, although her lips kept moving. "They not close."

"Not close?" I said with a frown. "They didn't get on?" The woman shook her head.

"Not seeing her often. No friends, no family, just books."

"Books?" I was already confused and now I was flat-out bewildered. I made a gesture like a book opening. "Books that you read?" The woman nodded.

"Books. All she do, books."

"But we didn't see any books in there," Shaw said, turning to me. He was right. I hadn't spotted any at all, not even tucked away in the cupboards. I was wondering if we'd misunderstood, but then I remembered the grey building with the tall stained glass windows just north of the square, the one that looked like an old church.

"The library," I said. "She got her books from the library?"

“Yes, library.” The woman tutted and scratched her chin. “Always at library. I think her, old Mikelson, they have something. She there late.”

“There late?” Shaw said, one eyebrow raised. “You can’t mean they were going together?”

“Sounds that way,” I said and the woman just picked up the sack and threw it over her shoulder again.

“I go,” she said, hurrying around us and down the street. I watched her scurry away, trying to force together this new information with what we already knew.

“So Loriatt might have had a thing for this librarian, Mikelson,” I said, rubbing my brow. Shaw snorted.

“I don’t know, he’s at least three times her age, probably more. And before you start wondering if he’s the murderer, I’ve seen the chap. He isn’t the kind to be raping women and burying them in the woods. He’s meek as hell, and he’d probably have a heart attack first.”

“Maybe he didn’t rape her. Maybe they had consensual sex and then something bad happened.”

“Sounds like a slim chance at best,” Shaw said with a grimace. “And the kind of image I could do without.”

“Aye, true. But if this fella is older, I’m assuming he fought in the first war. Maybe he was even friends with Loriatt’s grandfather. And if Loriatt had a thing for him, that could explain where those paintings went.”

“Shit.” Shaw smiled and rubbed his hands together. “Okay then, Sherlock. Let’s get ourselves to the library.”

## **Twenty Six (Katherine)**

I lay there on the bedroom floor and listened to Pieter and his father arguing downstairs, but even though I could hear their voices raised high, I couldn't make out anything that they were saying. My heart was still pounding and my head ached so bad and I couldn't stop the tears from coming. I'd tried to move, tried to wriggle out of the chair, but the rope was tied too tight. I was stuck in place, helpless.

"Help me," I whispered, to no one at all. Suddenly I felt exhausted, my eyelids drooping. The floor was wet and warm beneath my cheek, my shoulder numb from lying in an awkward position for too long, but I started to drift away until I felt soft vibrations beneath me and I realised that someone was walking across the room towards me. My eyes snapped open again and I tried to twist my head around to see who it was. Pieter was staring down at me with an irritated expression. He wasn't the same person I knew, the boy I'd grown up with. He was a stranger, the way he stared at me with such hate.

"Idiot," he said, reaching down and grabbing me by the arm. I cringed away, but he heaved me upwards with enough force to pop my arm from its socket before setting the chair straight again. My shoulder was burning but I didn't cry out or whimper. My face was already a mask of tears and I didn't want him to see me blubbing more. He stood over me, scratching his chest like he had a rash there. "My leg hurts like a bastard," he muttered. "I should cut you open too, see how you like that."

"Fuck you," I spat, immediately regretting it. I thought he was going to thump me good, but after a while he just smiled and shook his head.

"You're such a brat," he said. "You know, the only reason I was friends with you was because Thomas felt sorry for you. Just a sad little orphan girl."

"I'd rather be a sad little orphan than a crazy freak."

"Freak?" Pieter said, his mouth twisting. He leaned into me, grabbing and squeezing the arm rests and pushing his face up to mine. "I'm not a freak, you little shit."

"Carving all those figures," I said, shaking against the chair. "Pretending Lorient liked you. You're mad."

“She did like me!” he roared, blasting spit into my eyes. “She wanted me! And I had her, I fucked her! She would have been my girlfriend if father hadn’t killed her!” He pulled away again and I watched, horrified, as he started to pound his fist into the wall beside me, over and over. He was screaming and cursing but I could still hear the crack of his knuckles against the plaster. He didn’t stop for a dozen or more punches and when his arm finally dropped to his side and he turned back to me, panting and muttering, his hand had split open and there was blood dripping down his fingers. I could only stare back at him, my mouth gaping wide. Pieter glanced down at his torn knuckles and then across at the blood smear on the wall and he a sinister kind of smile settled on his lips. I honestly thought I was going to be sick and I didn’t even realise that Arndt had come into the room until I heard his voice booming out.

“What are you doing,” he said. “Have you gone crazy? What’s all this noise?”

“Shut up,” Pieter mumbled, his smile dropping. “I’m not crazy. I’m better than you. I’ve always been better than you and you just can’t stand it! That’s why she wanted me, not you!”

“Listen to yourself,” Arndt hissed as he stepped around me and Pieter backed off a step, almost bumping into the wall. “You need to calm down, son.”

“I am calm!” Pieter yelled, then he pushed past his father and half-stomped, half-limped back across the room and out into the hallway. Arndt glanced down at me, then he turned and followed his son and I sat there, breathing hard and wondering what had just happened. They were each as crazy as the other one. Even now, I could hear them still arguing as they headed downstairs, their voices rising until they were almost screaming at each other. But then, another sound made my heart skip. Over their shouting, I heard a dog barking somewhere just outside the house. And straight away I knew that it was Katz. He’d followed my scent here and now he was confused, wondering why I was locked away inside this house.

“No,” I said, biting my lip. “No, Katz, keep away, boy. They’ll kill you. They’ll kill you!”

Once more I tried to struggle against the ropes, but all I managed to do was rock back and forth, almost tipping the chair again. My chest was burning now, my throat too. I waited for the chair to settle and then I tried a different approach. This time I pushed my toes into the floor and then I jerked my body, forcing my left shoulder forwards and then my right, over and over. Each time, the chair scraped an inch across the floorboards. I kept at it, wriggling my way closer and closer to the door, an inch at a time. It was painfully slow and the effort made my spine hurt but I kept at it, clenching my teeth and trying my best to ignore the pain. I was terrified that the sound of the chair legs scratching the bare wood would bring Pieter or his father back, but for now they were still arguing downstairs. So I kept at it, grunting and whimpering until finally I reached the open door and edged out into the hallway.

I glanced around and saw that I'd been left in the room opposite Pieter's bedroom. The stairs were just to my right, the argument still drifting up from the downstairs corridor. With horror, I realised that they were talking about Katz.

"We can't have that thing out there barking," Arndt said and I could hear the panic in his voice.

"I'll sort him out," was Pieter's reply. "He's soft as anything and he likes me. Quick knife to the throat'll shut him up." He sounded so pleased with himself and I felt a sharp stab in my gut as his words sunk in. Immediately I started to shuffle forwards again, aiming for Pieter's bedroom.

"No, lure him to the back," Arndt said. "We can't risk someone coming by and seeing."

"Coming by? No one ever comes by, not now you strangled Lorient!"

"Listen to me, you stupid boy! The library is closed so I could be here to deal with this! If someone sees it shut they might come here instead, thinking I've dropped dead or who knows what!"

"Okay then, fine," Pieter said. "I'll go do it around the back."

I was edging into Pieter's room when I heard a door slam shut downstairs and my stomach leapt into my throat. The bastard was right. Katz looked fierce as anything and he'd rip smaller animals to shreds in a heartbeat, but

he trusted humans. It was my fault for helping to raise him. He wouldn't stand a chance against Pieter. Desperate and terrified, I inched my way into the bastard's bedroom and my head swung back and forth. All I needed was a sharp edge, something to cut through the rope. I was hoping to see Pieter's craft knife or something else just lying on his bed or maybe on the floor, but there was nothing. I slumped forwards and let out a soft moan. Useless. They were going to kill Katz and then kill me too and no one would probably ever know. Maybe Captain King would wonder what had happened to me, for a moment. Then he'd probably just figure that I'd moved on, not knowing that my bones were buried somewhere close by.

A thought came to me. I could shuffle back out into the hallway and drag the chair to the top of the staircase, before throwing myself down. Maybe the chair would shatter and I'd be free. I'd have a chance to save myself and Katz. Or maybe I'd break my neck and that'd be that. Either way, it was a better choice than sitting here, just waiting to die. I actually started to twist the chair back around, a painful act that made my neck ache worse than anything, but then I remembered why I'd come up here in the first place, the reason all of this had happened. The bow and sling of arrows. As fast as I could, I worked my way across the room to the far corner. My heart was going all out and the sight of the sling, still sat there where I'd left it, kept it pounding. Awkwardly I twisted around again. The sound of the chair legs thumping into the floorboards seemed horribly loud, but I had no choice. All I could do was tense every muscle and pray that no one downstairs heard the banging and came up to investigate. Finally I managed to get into position, my fingertips brushing the rough sack that the arrows were stashed away inside. I grabbed at the sling, fumbling it until my hand slipped inside the opening. A second later, one of the arrow heads cut into my palm, the sharp edge slicing through my skin like paper. I winced, but I didn't pull away. I didn't want to risk the whole lot falling out of reach. Instead, I carefully moved my hand to the side and gripped the arrow by its wooden shaft, then I shuffled forwards until the thing popped free.

Right away, I got to work with the arrow head. My hand hurt like hell and was bleeding bad, but I sawed away at the ropes wrapped around my wrists, already feeling them start to fray. The more it hurt, the faster I cut.

And then, from somewhere down below, I heard a gunshot.

## Twenty Seven (Adam)

When we arrived at the library, I reached out and tugged the imposing iron handle that jutted out of the centre of the door. Nothing happened. I tried again, twisting both ways, but the bloody thing was locked up tight. I frowned and turned to Shaw.

“No such luck,” I said with a shrug. “It’s closed.”

“Closed?” Shaw returned my frown. “Funny time to close. Can’t still be on his lunch, surely.”

“No idea.” I stepped up to the nearest window and cupped my hands against it, then pressed my nose up to the glass. The insides were dark but I could see just enough to realise that the place was empty. I was about to pull away again when I glanced up and noticed the paintings lining the walls, just over the bookcases. “Looks like our theory could be gold,” I called back. “The place is full of war portraits.”

“See any from Schmidt’s place?” Shaw asked. I leaned back and shook my head.

“Nope, but maybe they’re at the librarian’s house. We should go pay him a visit.”

This time we got lucky with our stop-and-ask technique. The very first woman we interrupted not only spoke perfect English, she was also more than happy to reveal where the librarian lived.

“It’s the big house just off the lake,” she told us. “On the north bank. Just follow this road and when you reach the water, you’ll see it on the other side.”

We thanked her and followed the directions and sure enough, when we came to the lake, the house was in plain sight, stood alone on the opposite bank. I’d noticed it before, shining by the glow of dusk as we sat around on this side, drinking and smoking and playing cards. Of course, I’d never

really paid it any attention, even though the bloody thing almost demanded it. Sat out there on its own, the house looked like it should have belonged to some kind of rich, brooding hermit rather than an elderly librarian.

“Which way should we go around?” Shaw asked and I glanced right, towards the woods.

“Let’s try that way.”

The bank between the trees and the water was slightly spongy underfoot and a carpet of old footprints were imprinted in the dirt, as well as dozens of identical tracks. I stared at the grooves as we worked our way around the lake and this feeling in my gut, a feeling that we had found our man, burned more fiercely than our evening bonfires.

“Looks like cart tracks,” I said, licking my lips. “Thick and far apart, right?”

“Yep,” Shaw replied. “No hooves or anything, so a hand-pulled cart I guess?”

“Aye, must be. Thinking what I’m thinking?”

“Uhh.” Shaw scratched his cheek and frowned, before turning to me wide-eyed. “Oh, Jesus. He could’ve killed the girl at his house and dragged her to the woods in that cart to dump the body.”

“We were probably sat right over there when he did it,” I said, turning and nodding towards the south bank. “Too busy throwing back wine and whiskey.”

“We’d never have seen him anyway,” Shaw said. “Not in the dark, at that distance.”

“Your pistol loaded?” I asked and he nodded, patting the gun at his hip.

“Reckon this old codger might give us some trouble?”

“Chances are he’s already killed at least one person,” I muttered. “Probably two. I’m not taking any chances, not after Lane.”

*And not after Kelly, and everyone else I’ve ever failed.*



Our path joined a cracked and neglected old road, which swept around the west side of the lake and connected the house to the rest of town. As we made our way down the road, I heard the sound of a dog barking, but I didn't pay it any attention. Not until we were almost at the house. I stopped beside the squat fence that marked the edge of the property and stretched an arm out, pushing it into Shaw's chest. He stumbled to a halt and stared at me.

"What is it?"

"The barking," I said. The sound was coming from somewhere behind the house. "That's Katz."

"Katz?"

"Katherine's dog. Big old German Shepherd." I flicked the cover from my holster and rested a palm on my revolver. Already my insides were churning and that familiar nausea grew in my gut, my mouth flooding with saliva. The bottle of pills were in my jacket pocket still, untouched since the previous night, but as hungry and as desperate as I was, I left them right there. Instead I turned my head to spit and then sucked down endless deep breaths, filling my lungs with the moist, warm air.

"You okay?" Shaw asked and I nodded, wiping away the strands of spit clinging to my chin.

"Let's go."

We pushed through the front gate and had just started towards the door when the barking cut to a whimper, and then silence. Shaw and I paused and glanced at each other.

"Not good," he muttered. I turned and glanced across the garden, towards the corner of the house.

"Let's see if we can sneak around," I said. I led the way, hugging the wall and ducking underneath the huge front window that overlooked the lake. We were in luck. Another gate connected the front and back gardens and I crept up and undid the latch, carefully easing it open. Thankfully the thing didn't groan out loud and we slipped through, gently closing the gate behind us. At the far corner, I paused again and pulled my gun free, holding

it tight so it didn't slip against my sweaty palm. Shaw settled right behind me. I raised my hand and counted down from three on my fingers, then we pushed out into the back garden.

The yard was enormous, half filled with vegetable patches arranged in long, tidy rows. The first thing I spotted was the cart, sat off to one side. Just as we thought, it was a simple hand-drawn affair, filled with old blankets and crap. Quickly I swept my eyes across the crops towards the back end of the house and that's when I saw him, standing there with the bloody knife clutched in one hand, the sun gleaming off the blade. He was young, maybe only fifteen or so. He was stood almost facing me, but his face was lowered and he was staring at something down on the ground. I dropped my gaze and saw the sack of bloody hair and flesh spread just in front of his feet. The dog was still twitching, but I couldn't tell if it was desperately clinging to life or if this was just the spasm of death, making it kick out with its paws.

I pulled back the safety on my gun and stepped forwards, Shaw coming up to my side with his own weapon drawn. The kid's head snapped up and his eyes darted between us. He still had the knife in his hand and I shouted out to him, told him to drop it in German and then in English, but he kept on staring at us, his mouth hanging open like he was some naughty child who couldn't understand why his parents were screaming at him.

"Put it down or we'll shoot" Shaw ordered, but instead the kid turned and sprinted towards the house, his boots kicking up mud. Immediately Shaw took off after him, cursing to himself.

"No, wait," I yelled, breaking into a run. I could barely breathe after just five steps, my chest heaving like some useless broken-down machine, but I kept on going, watching as the boy slammed through the back door into the house. Shaw leapt over the dog and cleared the short distance to the house in no time, kicking open the door and aiming his gun inside. A second later a gunshot rang out, shattering the silence. Shaw staggered back a step and I came up behind him, wrapping an arm across his torso. I saw the wild-eyed old man stood inside the kitchen with a pistol in his hand and a grimace on his lips and he fired again just as I pulled Shaw to the side, dragging us down into the mud beside the door. As we fell, a red hot pain flashed across my bicep and I knew that the bullet had carved its way through my flesh,

thankfully missing the bone. My first gunshot wound in months, and it was all thanks to a fucking librarian.

“Shaw,” I gasped, rolling him onto his back while I kept my gun trained on the doorway. “How bad is it?”

“Oh, bollocks,” was his reply, and he pressed a hand to his gut. “Bastard, shit!”

“Alright, just keep pressure on it. Stay still, keep pressure, okay?”

“Right, right,” he said, the artery in his neck jutting from the skin as he clenched his jaw. “Just go get that asshole.”

I grabbed a rock from the dirt and took a step backwards, then I swung back and hurled the thing at a window to my left. The rock smashed through the glass, shattering the whole pane into a million tiny pieces. As the fragments rained down I was already hurling myself at the doorway, my body hunched up to make myself as small as possible. The moment I dove inside, I had a millisecond to react. The old man was stood in the same position, his head twisted towards the broken window, a look of shock creasing his face. That was all the distraction I needed. I squeezed the trigger twice, ducking to my right as the other gun came swinging back towards me, but he didn't get a chance to fire off another shot. My bullets struck him in the chest, knocking him into the wall. He stood there for a moment, his arms dropped to his sides and blood seeping down his waistcoat, before the life seemed to leave his legs. Then he sank to his knees and slumped sideways, his bright blue eyes still fixed on me.

The first thing I did was grab his gun and slip it into my pocket, or at least half slip it in; the thing was too large, so the handle was jutting out. Our librarian was still breathing and I didn't want to take the chance of leaving him alone with a loaded weapon nearby. That done, I crept into the next room in search of a phone. I found myself in a lounge that doubled as a dining room, filled with all kinds of war memorabilia and paintings like Schmidt's. The telephone was stuck away in a corner, beside a battered old helmet stuck to a standing post. I crammed myself into the corner, almost knocking the stand over, then I lodged the handset between my cheek and my shoulder and dialled with one hand, keeping my gun in the other. After three rings, the Major picked up.

“Major Stevenson.”

“Major, it’s Captain King,” I gasped, still fighting for breath. “Lieutenant Shaw has been shot, we need medical to the old house on the north bank of the lake.”

“Shot? Did you say shot?”

“Yes, sir, he needs assistance quick.”

“What the hell are you doing? What’s going-”

“Thank you, sir,” I said, then I dropped the handset back onto the cradle and dragged a sleeve across my brow. It came away soaked in sweat. I swallowed back the bile that was spurting into my throat and then I headed for the hallway, eight bullets still to spend.

## **Twenty Eight (Katherine)**

There were more gunshots from downstairs, but what panicked me even more was the sound of footsteps racing up the stairs. I didn’t know what was going on, but I couldn’t let them catch me in here. I prayed for whoever it was to stay away from Pieter’s bedroom and I kept on working the rope with the arrow head, feeling more and more strands springing free. My fingers were numb and I was terrified of dropping the arrow, now wet and slippery from my blood. The footsteps were louder, closer, and then Pieter staggered into the room, clutching his injured leg and wincing. The moment he glanced across and saw me, his face dropped.

“What are you doing in here?” he asked, limping his way towards me, his boots stomping over the bare floorboards. I braced myself, every muscle tensed, but then I felt the rope around my wrists give way and suddenly my arms were free. Pieter was almost on me, raising a knife and pointing the blade at my chest. I let him get just two steps away, then I cried out and swung the arrow with all my strength. The tip buried itself in the bastard’s hand, slicing right through to other side. He screamed and dropped the

knife, staring down at the bloody arrow head poking out of his palm, and I didn't waste any time watching. My ankles were still tied to the chair legs, so I had to throw myself forwards off the seat and land on my knees, scrabbling for the knife. Pieter saw what I was doing and grabbed my hair with his other hand, yanking my head back, but I already had the knife in my grasp. I stared up at him, teeth bared, and then I sank the blade into his stomach as far as it would go. He didn't scream again, or make any noise at all. He just peered down, like he couldn't believe what I'd done, before his fingers slipped through my hair and I was free again. I tugged the knife out and then I drove it into his gut again, a little higher up. This time he moaned, stumbling backwards. I kept a hold of the knife and the blade slipped out as Pieter staggered away, legs trembling like he was drunk. Finally he dropped to the floor, landing on his arse and slumping back against the wall. The bastard was still staring at me while I sliced through the ropes around my feet, but by the time I cut through them and pulled myself free, his head had tilted forwards so his chin was resting on his chest. I could still hear him grunting as he tried to breathe, but I knew he was done for.

I started towards the door, but stopped when I heard footsteps coming up the staircase. They were already almost at the top and I pictured Pieter's father clutching a gun, coming to finish me off. I still didn't know why there had been gunshots in the first place. My eyes watered as I thought about them shooting Katz while he stood there, helpless, and then I felt a burning rage inside and I squeezed the knife handle tight.

"Bastards," I muttered, crushing myself up against the wall, between Pieter and the door. I'd wait for the old man to come in and then I'd get him, take him by surprise. I couldn't wait to see the look on his face, the same look that Pieter had when he glanced down and saw the knife in his belly. He was coming slowly down the hallway now, just a few paces away. Pieter was still groaning down beside me and I wanted to press my hand over his mouth, or just slip the blade into his throat to shut him up for good, but there was no time. The footsteps were right outside the door now. I raised the knife up over my shoulder and waited until I saw a shadow creep across the floorboards, then I pushed away from the wall and yelled as I stabbed at the figure stood in the doorway.

But I was too slow. A strong arm caught me across the jaw and knocked me to the side, where I crashed to the ground. My elbow smashed into the hard floor and the sudden agony made me drop the knife, which went skidding off across the floorboards. I whimpered and rolled onto my back, expecting to see Pieter's father glaring down at me. Instead, I was shocked to see Captain King. He looked confused, his gun clutched in his right hand.

"Katherine?" he said and the burning feeling deep inside died down. Clutching my elbow, I picked myself off the floor and stared up at him.

"What are you doing here?" I asked and he shook his head.

"What are *you* doing here? Where's that boy gone to?"

"They were keeping me prisoner," I told him. "Pieter's in there." I pointed a finger back into the room and Captain King peered around the corner, then he turned back with both eyebrows raised.

"Jesus. You really did a number on him."

"What happened to Katz?" I asked, already pushing past him and hurrying to the staircase. My head throbbed with every step but I didn't care. I just wanted to see him again.

"Hey, Katherine, wait!" Captain King called out. He caught up to me at the top of the steps and followed me down. "That kid, he...he hurt your dog pretty bad. I don't even know if..."

"No," I whispered, almost stumbling over my own feet again. At the bottom of the staircase I leapt down the final two steps and ran down the hallway, sprinting through the kitchen. I barely noticed Pieter's father, lying there on the kitchen floor, groaning to himself. I bounded past him and out into the garden, where I caught myself and stopped dead, a hand pressed to my mouth. Katz was lying perfectly still with his back to me. Before I even shuffled over to him, my shoes dragging through the grass and dirt, I knew that I was too late. I moved to his side and peered down into those enormous, lifeless eyes, stuck wide open, and then I knelt down and placed a hand on his flank, running my fingers through his thick fur. He was still warm. "Katz. I'm sorry, boy. It's all my fault." For the second time, I couldn't stop the tears from coming. They washed down my cheeks and fell onto Katz's chest, where they seeped away into his fur.

Behind me, Captain King was tending to another soldier. Slowly I turned and watched them, the other soldier wincing and swearing while Captain King fussed over him. Then King rose and headed back inside. Back to where Arndt was writhing in pain. I bent down and kissed Katz once on the top of his head, then I carefully got back to my feet and followed him inside the house.

When I walked up and joined Captain King's side, Arndt was confessing to the murders. He glared at me, his mouth all twisted.

"Just ask her," he growled in English, "I told her everything. Now where's my son? I want to see my son!" He broke into a coughing fit, his chest shaking and oozing blood.

"He's upstairs," Captain King told him. "Did he have anything to do with these killings?"

"No!" Arndt rolled his head back and forth, wheezing loudly. "No, he's a good boy. He's just a little mixed up."

"Did he rape Lorielt?" Captain King asked and Arndt stared up at him, his chin trembling.

"No," he whispered. "No, he just...he wanted to see what it was like. That's what he told me. He loved her, he loved that girl."

"Wait, hang on, I'm confused." Captain King crouched at Arndt's side. "Did he rape the girl or not?"

"It's not rape," Pieter's father said, "if she's already dead."

We watched him wheeze and cough for a moment, while those words sunk in. Finally Captain King turned away and gazed out through the open door.

"That explains it, then," he muttered. "Why she was covered in dirt, but left out in the open beside a shallow pit. Why all her clothes had been pulled off right there in the woods. Jesus Christ. He went back for her." He rubbed his temples with both hands. "What about another English soldier? Did you see a soldier that night, when you buried her?"

“A soldier,” Arndt repeated, breaking into another coughing fit. He paused to lift a trembling hand to his lips and wipe away the dark spit that trickled down to his chin. “Yes, the madman in the car. I thought he was going to crash into my cart, he was going so fast. We hid in the woods while he stopped to take a look. He could barely even stand, the drunken fool. He saw her body and he started screaming and waving his arms. Mad, completely mad. Somehow he managed to get back into his car and drive away.”

“Stupid, shitty luck,” Captain King said. “That soldier died because of you.”

“Not just him,” I said. Captain King hadn’t noticed when I slipped my hand into his pocket and pulled out the gun that was sticking out. He didn’t try and stop me either, when I stepped forwards and took the safety off, just like he’d shown me. “He killed a lot of people. He probably killed my parents.”

“I told you,” Arndt spluttered, “I don’t know anything about that.” His eyes were full of fear when I pointed the gun at his head and slipped my finger over the trigger. I was glad of that. I thought he might welcome death after all the things he’d done, maybe the guilt was too much to bear. But he wasn’t ready yet. He wanted to cling onto life and I stared at him long and hard, eating up his fear, before I pulled the trigger.

The gun kicked in my hand and the noise was sharp enough to make me flinch, but I got him right where I was aiming, right between his eyes. The grunting and the wheezing came to an end and his head rolled to the side. Then the only sound in the kitchen was the echo of the gunshot, and then silence. I stood there, staring down at him until Captain King rested a hand on my shoulder and took the gun from my hand. That was when I heard the trucks pulling up outside.

“They’re going to ask you what happened,” Captain King told me, his voice soft. “Tell them everything except for this. I shot him and he died and then I came upstairs and found you, alright?” I just nodded in reply, before the front door was kicked in and soldiers flooded into the hallway.



## Twenty Nine (Adam)

The Major took it all better than I thought he would, to be honest. He sat there in silence, smoking his cigar and drinking port until I'd finished recounting the whole sorry bloody tale and then he took a dramatic puff, possibly to gather his thoughts on the whole matter, before unleashing the smoke as a huge sigh.

"So," he said, fixing his glare on me, "even though I said that the investigation was over, you decided to stick with it."

"Yes, sir."

"And now both of your men are laid up in the infirmary with serious injuries and we've got three more bodies in the morgue."

"And we found the real killers, sir," I said, trying to keep my calm. "Before they murdered an innocent girl." The Major took another drag and leaned back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling, smoke trailing from his nostrils.

"Christ on a bike," he muttered. He glanced down at his glass of port and then turned back to me with a frown. "So Lieutenant Turner had nothing to do with it." I shook my head and cleared my throat.

"He stumbled across the body disposal by accident. He was driving down back from Kungsbrucken and almost hit the cart they were using to drag the girl to the woods. He probably got out, pulled back whatever they were hiding her under and saw her lying there underneath...unfortunately, he was so out of it that the shock of seeing the girl's face was all he remembered."

"Shit," the Major said, eyes glazing over. "He bloody confessed. He looked me right in the eye and said he was sorry."

"Well, he didn't murder Lorielt, but he probably did kill Theodor Lemann. Or at the very least, he helped Theodor's wife hide the body." The Major stared at me for a moment, then he waved his hand at me.

“I need to think all this through,” he said. “I don’t know how the hell I’m going to report all this back to the bigwigs. They’ll think I’ve gone stark raving bloody mad.”

“I think we all have, sir,” I said as I got to my feet. Then I saluted and strode from the office.

Katherine was waiting for me outside, staring off into the distance with her hands wedged into her jacket pockets. I had to call her name before she even realised I was standing there, then she blinked twice and pushed away from the wall.

“Next stop, the infirmary,” I said. She just nodded and joined my side and we started the short walk in silence. I tried to think of something to say, but she was lost in her own little world and had been ever since I found her in that house. I couldn’t blame her. The things she’d been through, the things she’d had to do, were enough to mess anyone up for life. And of course, Katz’s absence was all too obvious. “You holding yourself together?” I asked her. She peered up at me and sniffed, dragging her sleeve across her brow and tugging back the stray strands of hair.

“I...think so.” She sniffed again. “Do you think they’ll be following me now, just like your ghosts?”

“Who, the librarian and his son?” I shook my head. “No. I’m pretty sure Katz’s ghost would chase them right off. You know how jealous that dog was. He’d never let another spirit get near you.” I was relieved as anything when a slight smile trembled on her lips.

“I think you’re right,” she said. “I can’t feel them there.”

“Aye, you’re safe enough.”

When we walked into the infirmary, the doc was sat in the front office with his feet up on his desk and his face stuck in a book as usual. He looked up long enough to wave us on and then got back to reading. We left him to it and wandered into the ward, currently occupied by just two patients. Mick Oliver had been taken back to the barracks to rest up before his court martial, where a rotating guard made sure he didn’t think about doing a runner. That left Corporals Terry Wightman and Michael Shaw, who were

laid up in beds just a few feet apart. Wightman was awake and he looked utterly fed up, greeting me with a depressed little frown.

“Corporal,” I said and he let out a groan.

“Why do I have to be stuck in a room with this bastard?” Wightman rolled his head on his pillow and glared at Shaw, who was still passed out, probably from the sedatives the doc pumped into him. I smiled.

“I heard what happened from the Major. So it was Oliver who started the fire?”

“Little twat shot me an’ all,” Wightman growled. “After everything I’ve done for ‘im. I’ll rip his fucking nuts off with my bare hands and shove ‘em in his ears.”

“I think he’ll be executed long before you get the chance,” I told him, following with a shrug. “How you feeling?”

“Pretty stupid, mostly.” He sighed, long and loud. “Oh well, if you’re gonna get shot, might as well get shot in an infirmary, right? Hey, Cap, you got a spare fag? I’ve been dying for a smoke for ages.”

“Course.” I slipped him the leftovers in my pack, about five sticks, and he grinned from ear to ear.

“Cheers, guv.” He snatched one between his teeth and lit it with my lighter, doing us the courtesy of turning his head to blow out the smoke. “By the way, I talked to that Lemann bird. Wasn’t her who offed her husband, it was Turner alright.”

“You know that for sure?” I asked and he nodded.

“She was pretty put out when she heard the news. Then she told me that she teased her husband before he stormed on out, rubbing it in that she was jumping into the sack with some other guy. But she didn’t tell him who.” He paused as if it was some grand revelation, and all I could do was stare back and eventually shake my head.

“So?”

“So, what if the husband, furious as fuck, got it into his head that Turner was the guy she was fucking? The lad already stepped in to break up their

fight and walked her home, right?”

“Jesus,” I whispered, stroking my forehead. “So he could’ve gone looking for Turner for some revenge, but came out considerably worse off.”

“Then Turner shoved the body away, pretended nothing happened.” Wightman took another drag and shrugged. “Just a theory. Obviously going to be a little hard to say what really happened, no witnesses and all.”

“Aye,” I said, suppressing a smile. “Good work there. Looks like you’re settling into the job nicely.”

“Oh, please,” Wightman said with a roll of his eyes. “You’re making me fucking blush. How about you, any luck with your little murder theory? And who’s the runt?” He nodded at Katherine and she wrinkled her nose.

“What’s a runt?” she asked. Wightman laughed.

“She speaks English, eh? Better than half ah those useless fuckers in town.”

I was wondering whether to plunge into the events of the past few hours for the fourth or fifth time so far today, but just the thought of it completely drained my soul. Luckily I didn’t have to worry, as the doc pushed his way inside at that exact moment with a harangued look on his face. He came straight up to us and grabbed Shaw’s arm, pinching his wrist to take a pulse.

“What’s the diagnosis?” I asked him. “They both going to pull through okay?”

“This one’s got a ruptured spleen. Surgeon sorted him out, he’ll be alright with some rest.” The doc glanced over at Wightman and shook his head. “That one, I don’t know. The bullet’s still somewhere inside of him. To be honest, I’m amazed he’s not already dead.”

“Fuck that for a laugh,” Wightman said, stubbing the fag out on the wall. “I feel fine. I’ll be doing cartwheels this time tomorrow.”

“We’ll see,” the doc said. “Anyway, reason I came in is, you have a visitor.”

“Who has a visitor?” Wightman asked. “I have a visitor?”

“Yes, you. You wanna see her?”

“Her?” His face creased. “Who is it?”

“The girl who was holding you together when I found you lying in my bloody hallway.” The doc sighed. “Well? Yay or nay?”

“Sure,” Wightman said, resting his head back against the wall. “Show her in.”

“Should we leave you two in peace?” I asked him as the doc stepped out of the room. Wightman snorted.

“What, are you joking? Chances are she’ll try and smother me with my pillow. She’s a fucking psycho, that one.” He shut up as soon as the door swung open again and Emily Hanna shuffled in, looking for all the world like she had no idea what she was doing here. She joined us, fidgeting with a corner of her sleeve.

“I came to see how you were,” she said to Wightman and his smile widened by about an inch.

“I knew you liked me really,” he said and she narrowed her eyes.

“No, I just....” She shook her head and huffed out a breath. “You really are a...”

“Massive bastard?” I offered and Wightman snorted again. Emily glanced at me and Katherine and then back to the injured Corporal.

“I should go,” she said and she turned to leave, but Wightman called out her name after just two steps and she turned back.

“Thanks for not just running out on me before,” he told her. She stared at him like she was searching for something to say, then she shrugged.

“I heard you talking with him, before he shot you. You went there for the same reason I did.”

“Well, I went there to kick his arse.” Wightman scratched his neck. “But I guess you did a better job.”

I almost jumped out of my skin when Shaw launched into a coughing fit behind me and I spun around, watching him claw back the sheets and

wearily open his eyes. He peered at me and then each of the others, ending on Wightman. As soon as he saw his ward buddy, Shaw's face collapsed.

"Oh, bollocks," he muttered, "not him. Not that fucking asshole."

### **Thirty (Emily)**

When I left the infirmary, the sky was almost dark and the few working streetlights had flickered on, bathing the town in orange light. I pulled my collar up and glanced to my left at the sound of voices. Captain King was leaning against the wall, a cigarette making his face glow just like the pavements beneath the streetlights. The girl I'd seen with Arndt's boy Pieter was still at his side, kicking the toe of her shoe against the wall. She returned my stare, her face mostly hidden in the shadows. For a moment I hesitated, then I headed over, my hands buried deep inside my jacket pockets. Captain King turned towards me and took the cigarette from his mouth, clutching it between his fingers.

"Fraulein Hanna," he said, "how are you holding up?"

"I don't know anymore," I replied, the honest answer. "Everything just seems like some crazy dream. First the fire and then I hear about Arndt and Pieter and the things they've done." I shuddered involuntarily. "I called him a friend," I said, tasting the bitterness deep down at the very back of my throat. "He even let me sleep in his library, after the fire. I never thought he'd do something like this."

"Do you have keys to the library?" Captain King asked. I nodded, pulling the enormous brass key from my pocket and showing it to him.

"He gave me a spare, to use until I found somewhere else to live."

"Well, there's no next of kin or anyone else for that place to pass onto. And I don't know what we'd do with a big old library. Probably turn it into a bar or something." Captain King smiled. "You interested in taking it over?"

“You mean,” I said, staring down at the key in my hand. “I would own the library?”

“Aye, why not. Give you a place to live too.”

“Yes.” I couldn’t help but smile, squeezing the key tight and slipping it back inside my pocket. “It will need some work, but yes. I can do it.”

“Sounds great,” Captain King said. “Don’t suppose you’d have room for a lodger too?”

“Lodger?”

“Aye, a guest.” He pushed the girl forwards and her eyes widened.

“Guest?” she mumbled, “me?” She shook her head. “I can’t, I...”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Captain King said, taking a tone like he was her father. “Your house is a ruin and there’s no Katz to look after you anymore. You need somewhere to stay.” The girl turned to me with a sheepish look.

“It’s okay,” I told her. “You can come stay with me. There’s plenty of room and it’d be nice having someone else there. It’s a little bit creepy just on my own.” The pair of them smiled.

“There we go,” Captain King said. “All sorted. You should be on your way, starting to get properly dark now. Think I’ll head back inside, see if those two have killed each other yet.”

“Will you come visit tomorrow?” the girl asked him and he nodded.

“Of course I will. I’m not much of a reader, but I can help you guys redecorate maybe. Place looked a little old fashioned.” He finished off his cigarette and stubbed it out with his heel, then he ruffled the girl’s hair and strode back into the infirmary. The girl watched after him, then she turned to me and chewed on her lip.

“Are you sure it’s okay?” she asked and I tried to give her my best, warming smile.

“What’s your name?”

“Katherine, my name’s Katherine. And you’re Emily, right?”

“Right. Come on, Katherine, let’s go home.” I held out my hand and she took it gently, and together we strolled into the orange glow.

### **About the author**

Chris Barraclough is an award-winning crime author and journalist from Sunderland, now living in London. His debut tongue-in-cheek mystery novel 'Bat Boy' (told from the POV of a blind British boy searching for his father after a family tragedy) took him a sweat-inducing four years to write, but the pain was worth it. Bat Boy won the UK Authors Award and was published by the UKA Press, now available for eReaders.

Most recently, his darkly comic crime novel 'Dead Dogs' was nominated for the Dylan Thomas Sony Reader Award, and the first book in his Twin Towers Estate crime series, 'Crack', was shortlisted for the Page Turner Prize and nominated for the SpaSpa Award for best psychological fiction. You can pick up the entire Twin Towers series in two trilogies, and his thrilling The Bitch Is Back series is also now available in two collections.

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